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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SURREALISM IN DICKENS

BY

MONICA ANN STASUK

(C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to examine characteristic features of Dickens's novels from the perspective of surrealism. In its strictest sense, surrealism refers to the aesthetic aims of an exclusive group of French poets who began to collaborate in the early 1920's. The founder of surrealism, Andre Breton, defines these aims in terms of a quest for the unknown as manifest in poetic fusion of the realms of dream and waking life. Today, surrealism has a broader sense--it refers to fantastic and incongruous effects and images in art and literature which may be achieved through unnatural combinations and juxtapositions and which serve to awaken consciousness through probing the bounds of the logical.

I do not attempt to label Dickens a surrealist in this study, but rather, I attempt to identify aspects of his work that transcend the ordinary prescribed bounds of the Victorian novel in ways that are surreal in the broad sense of the term. I have chosen to concentrate on Dickens's later novels, particularly Bleak House, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend because these novels contain a variety of excellent examples of surrealism which demonstrate Dickens's exuberant imagination and the superb range of his creative genius.

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INTRODUCTION

In the history of Dickens criticism, the central issue that traditionally divides those who praise Dickens from those who scorn him is whether or not Dickens achieves any degree of "realism" in his novels. Fortunately, in the last few decades this debate has become outmoded because most modern literary critics agree that the term "realism" is in fact nebulous. However, in The Rise of the Novel, Ian Watt provides a satisfactory definition of realism as it applies to the domain of the novel, a concept he refers to as "formal realism." He states:

> The narrative method whereby the novel embodies this circumstantial view of life may be called its formal realism; formal, because the term realism does not here refer to any special literary doctrine or purpose, but only to a set of narrative procedures which are so commonly found together in the novel, and so rarely in other literary genres, that they may be regarded as typical of the form itself. Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.[1]

In Dickens on the Romantic Side of Familiar Things: Bleak House and the Novel Tradition, Robert Newsom notes that although Watt's definition is broad, it comprises "a bias for the sort of novel George Eliot writes . . . and a bias against the sort of novel Dickens writes."[2] This bias is well entrenched in the views of many of Dickens's contemporaries and

in those of some critics of later generations who believe that Dickens's novels are grossly exaggerated and highly improbable. Because Dickens employs fantastic, otherworldly and dreamlike elements in his novels, as the Gothic novelists do, he exposes himself to the charge that his fiction is not true to common experience, a view championed by G. H. Lewes, a major Victorian critic. Lewes expounds the conventional Victorian belief that the merit of a novel must be judged by the degree to which it accurately mirrors real life. Dickens challenges this rigid conception of literary realism. His belief, as recorded by George Ford, "that the reality of a novel, as of a play or narrative poem, depends upon imaginative imitation or stylization"[3] anticipates modern concepts of literary criticism.

Dickens's imaginative stylisation was not fully appreciated by critics until the twentieth century when there was a revival of critical interest in him which was led by Edmund Wilson. In his classic essay "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," Wilson discusses the symbolic power of Dickens's novels. He writes:

> [T]he people who like to talk about the symbols of Kafka and Mann and Joyce have been discouraged from looking for anything of the kind in Dickens, and usually have not read him, at least with mature minds. But even when we think we do know Dickens, we may be surprised to return to him and find in him a symbolism of a more complicated reference and a deeper implication than these metaphors that hang as emblems over the door. The Russians themselves, in this respect, appear to have learned from Dickens.[4]

George Ford identifies Wilson's application of symbolic readings to Bleak House, Little Dorrit, and Our Mutual Friend as "a turning point in the discussion of Dickens's status." As Ford explains, Wilson's recognition of the symbolic value of such details in Dickens's novels as the fog which permeates Bleak House, details which had previously been

regarded as superfluous, marked the beginning of a "critical revolution."[5] This is true not only because this method of criticism provided a fresh approach to Dickens's novels and consequently influenced many critics, but because it was a departure from decades of criticism in which Dickens was studied primarily in relation to "realism." In the preface to a collection of modern essays on Dickens entitled Dickens and the Twentieth Century, John Gross speaks of the impact of Wilson's essay:

> Of all modern writings on Dickens, Edmund Wilson's essay The Two Scrooges (1941) is the most dramatic. Wilson makes a brilliant case for Dickens as Dostoevsky's master, rather than a classic of the nursery, by effecting some simple but basic shifts of emphasis. He presents Dickens as a subversive and uncomfortable writer, inwardly hostile to the age which acclaimed him and seeking relief from the strain of his double life in fantasies of crime and violence. Far more weight is given to the macabre or savage element in Dickens than in any previous account, with the result that his last novels emerge as his masterpieces, while at the same time he is absolved from the familiar charges of exaggeration and cheap melodrama; instead of reprimanding Dickens for his lack of realism, we are recommended to look in his works for symbolism, poetry, and all the devices of an experimental novelist.[6]

If Dickens is to be regarded as an experimental novelist, it is remarkable, in retrospect, that G. H. Lewes was among the first to recognise one of his experimental techniques. In "Dickens in Relation to Criticism," Lewes praises Dickens for the lucidity of his hallucinations:

> Of him it may be said with less exaggeration than of most poets, that he was of "imagination all compact"; if the other higher faculties were singularly deficient in him, this faculty was imperial. He was a seer of visions; and his visions were of objects at once familiar and potent. Psychologists will understand both the extent and limitation of the remark, when I say that in no other sane mind (Blake, I believe, was not perfectly sane) have I observed vividness of imagination approaching so close to hallucination. . . . When he imagined a street, a house, a room, a figure, he saw it not in the vague schematic way of ordinary imagination, but in the sharp definition of actual perception, all the salient details

> obtruding themselves on his attention. He, seeing it thus vividly, made us also see it; and believing in its reality, however fantastic, he communicated something of his belief to us. He presented it in such relief that we ceased to think of it as a picture. So definite and insistent was the image, that even while knowing it was false we could not help, for a moment, being affected, as it were, by his hallucination.[7]

It is interesting to compare a post-Wilson analysis of Dickens's hallucinatory perceptions to this of Lewes. In her classic essay "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," Dorothy Van Ghent examines the description of the view from Todgers's boardinghouse in Martin Chuzzlewit:

> After the first glance, there were slight features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether the spectator would or no. Thus, the revolving chimney-pots on one great stack of buildings seemed to be turning gravely to each other every now and then, and whispering the result of their separate observation of what was going on below. Others, of a crook-backed shape, appeared to be maliciously holding themselves askew, that they might shut the prospect out and baffle Todgers's. The man who was mending a pen at an upper window over the way, became of paramount importance in the scene, and made a blank in it, ridiculously disproportionate in its extent, when he retired. The gambols of a piece of cloth upon the dyer's pole had far more interest for the moment than all the changing motion of the crowd. Yet even while the looker-on felt angry with himself for this, and wondered how it was, the tumult swelled into a roar; the hosts of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold; and after gazing round him quite scared, he turned into Todgers's again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told M. Todgers afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut: that is to say, head-foremost.[8]

As Van Ghent perceives, in this dizzying passage, in which "non-human existences rage with an indiscriminate life of their own,"[9] Dickens employs hallucination as a means, not of transcribing a scene from life, but of expressing the profound sense of alienation that an observer of the view from Todgers's feels from the physical world. She adds:

> The prospect from Todgers's is one in which categorical determinations of the relative significance of objects--as of the chimney-pots, the blank upper window, or the dyer's cloth--have broken down, and the observer on Todgers's roof is seized with suicidal nausea at the momentary vision of a world in which significance has been replaced by naked and aggressive existence.[10]

Critical observations such as Wilson's and Van Ghent's are the foundation to a modern approach to Dickens which values the symbolism, exaggeration, hallucinatory perception, grotesque distortion, and superabundant detail which characterise his fiction. Yet, critics have always expressed keen interest in Dickens's use of dreams and his ability to probe the depths of a character's psychological make-up, especially those characters of a criminal taint. Robert Newsom observes that "hallucinatory vividness of perception, which is the normal condition of Dickens's prose, is of course closely allied with his lifetime interest in frankly sensational and abnormal psychology";[11] and he quotes R. H. Hutton, who wrote, two years after Lewes's "Dickens in Relation to Criticism" appeared,

> [n]o author indeed could draw more powerfully than he the mood of a man haunted by a fixed idea, a shadowy apprehension, a fear, a dream, a remorse. If Dickens had to describe the restlessness of a murderer, or the panic of a man apprehending murder, he did it with a vigour and force that make the blood curdle. But there, again, he was studying in a world of most specific experience. He was a vivid dreamer, and no one knew better the sort of supremacy which a given idea gets over the mind in a dream, and in those waking states of nervous apprehension akin to dreams.[12]

It is interesting to note, as Newsom does, that early critical assessments of Dickens's use of hallucinatory and dreamlike perceptions such as those of Lewes and Hutton

> account in part for the waning of Dickens's reputation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the revival of critical interest in him in the twentieth (popular interest

> never having waned) as a psychological, anti-realist (even surrealist) novelist, one who invites comparison with Dostoevsky, Joyce, and Kafka.[13]

Although the term surrealism was not current until the twentieth century, it is an artistic perspective which illuminates the bizarre, grotesque and dreamlike qualities that characterise Dickens's novels. In his struggle to reach beyond the boundaries of conventional literary realism and to infuse his fiction with imaginative vitality, Dickens shares the quest of the surrealists, whose aim is to explore the "more real than real world behind the real."[14] In Literary Origins of Surrealism, Anna Balakian explains that this quest is, in essence, an insatiable desire to explore the unknown through poetic fusion of the realms of dream and waking life.

Dickens's preoccupation with the unknown is manifest in the symbols, dreams and hallucinations with which his fiction is imbued. The mysterious connection between known and unknown, real and imagined--often realised as the spilling over of the psychological drama of characters' lives into the inanimate world--recurs throughout his fiction. In this light, an early memory of Dickens's which Angus Wilson records in his biography of the author's life is interesting. Dickens was very conscious of how his early life affected his art, and when he was thirty-eight, he wrote about the toys he played with as a child; that one of those toys haunted him was a puzzle that intrigued him as an adult:

> When did that dreadful Mask first look at me? Who put it on, and why was I so frightened that the sight of it is an era in my life? It is not a hideous visage in itself; it is even meant to be droll; why then were its stolid features so intolerable? Surely not because it hid the wearer's face. An apron would have done as much; and though I should have preferred even the apron anyway, it would not have been absolutely insupportable like the Mask. Was it the

> immovability of the Mask? . . . Perhaps that fixed and set change coming over a real face, infused into my quickened heart some remote suggestion and dread of the universal change that is to come on every face, and make it still? Nothing reconciled me to it. . . . Nor was it any satisfaction to be shown the Mask, and see that it was made of paper, and to have it locked up and be assured that no one ever wore it. The mere recollection of that fixed face, the mere knowledge of its existence anywhere, was sufficient to awaken me in the night all perspiration and horror, with, 'O! I know it's coming! O! the Mask!'[16]

Wilson both acknowledges that Dickens's fascination with the Mask is a link to his lifelong obsession with the theatre, and recognises that the Mask represents a host of bizarre, grotesque and surreal elements in Dickens's fiction.[17] Phantom-like characters, dreams and dreamlike states, unnatural phenomena, projection of psychological states onto the physical environment, character doubling and extended personification of inanimate objects are characteristic features of Dickens's novels. These fictional equivalents to the Mask hide levels of meaning in such a way as to make them conspicuous.

Harry Stone recognises the function of the Mask in Dickens's novels. In the preface to Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making, Stone calls Dickens a magician--an artist who conceals in order to reveal.[18] He is aware, as are many other critics, of Dickens's exposition of the Hegelian definition of a symbol in his novels. Thomas Carlyle succinctly states that definition in Book Three, Chapter Three ("Symbols") of Sartor Resartus: "In a Symbol there is concealment and yet revelation: here therefore, by Silence and by Speech acting together, comes a double significance."[19] The Mask, a metaphor for the many devices of concealment in Dickens's novels, is tantalising; one must know what is hidden beneath it, even though one may--as Dickens did--fear it.

In "The Macabre Dickens," Humphry House dwells on Dickens's ability to reveal that which is apparently hidden, especially the psychological motivation of characters. He offers the following insight:

> [Dickens] has worked as much beneath the surface as above it . . . . The awful area of human experience in which small cruelty and meanness and stupidity may swell and topple over into murder, insane revenge, sadistic, bloody violence and riot; the area where dream and reality are confused or swiftly alternating--these are now seen to be closer to ourselves and to common life than our grandfathers suspected.[20]

Dickens's realm is the world of the subconscious in which symbols and dreams manifest hidden realities. One might say that the visions of the Mask that haunted his dreams when he was a child were transformed into the stuff of great fiction when he became an adult. In Dickens's symbolic world, the Mask, which requires both conscious and subconscious levels of interpretation, represents, in essence, the surrealistic techniques by which Dickens conceals in order to reveal. Through the use of surrealism, Dickens incorporates "the figments of our dreaming imaginations"[21] in his fiction, thus highlighting shades and perceptions of the subconscious domain.

Besides sharing the same quest as the surrealists--the quest for the unknown--Dickens shares their idea of what constitutes art. In simplest terms, the surrealists rejected the limiting bounds of what is considered natural in art; and, more importantly, they rejected the premise, which was standard for centuries, that "nature" is synonymous with "reality." Balakian explains that "the rivalry of photography, which could represent nature so much more accurately than art, finally caused the artist to be dissatisfied with imitation and drove him into competition with nature."[22] Dickens was not content with art that merely imitated nature, either. His use of bizarre and grotesque

fictional elements and his propensity to distort nature embody his rejection of the vogue among his critics and contemporaries that the novel was, ideally, "an untouched transcript of real life."[23] Dickens's estimation of this ideal was that such a "frightfully literal and catalogue-like" approach to the novel was "a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do."[24] Dickens's exuberant imagination was the inspiration for the fictional worlds he created; George Ford says he "was like a glassblower who . . . created magic shapes with traditional tools."[25] It is in the creation of his magic that Dickens often exemplifies surrealistic traits. Julien Levy states that

> [s]urrealism is inevitably opposed to naturalism, the pedestrian rendering of tangible fact. In-so-far as the painter or writer introduces an element of his own imagination and interpretation to the literal recording of fact, just so far does he introduce surrealism into his work.[26]

Surrealism is, in essence, an artistic perspective defying logic from which one views the eternal world through dreams, distortions, and unnatural and bizarre juxtapositions. Many critics identify examples of the peculiar and unconventional manifestations of Dickens's imagination as surreal. In an interesting examination of the dreams of Montague Tigg and Jonas Chuzzlewit, Joseph Brogunier particularly mentions the "strange, surrealistic city"[27] to which Jonas descends in his dream. This city is a type of underworld; it assaults the senses with clamouring bells, and festive crowds crying out "that it was the Last Day for all the world."[28] It is on an excursion through this nightmarish construct that Jonas mentally prepares himself to murder Tigg. Kenneth Ireland refers to the following passage from David Copperfield as an example of Dickens's imaginative vision:

> All day long, and until seven or eight in the evening, Mr. Mell, at his own detached desk in the schoolroom, worked hard with pen, ink, ruler, books, and writing-paper. . . . When he had put up his things for the night, he took out his flute, and blew at it, until I almost thought he would gradually blow his whole being into the large hole at the top, and ooze away at the keys.[29]

Noting this passage as an instance of human energy being transferred to the world of things, Ireland states, "Fantasy of a surrealist cast liquifies the solid flesh of Mell."[30] The animation of inanimate objects is a well-known phenomenon in Dickens's fiction. Donald Fanger observes that "[a] surrealist might approve of the way houses cogitate in Dickens ('Many years ago [the Clennam house] had it in its mind to slide down sideways'), the way furniture 'hides,' or the way a churchyard seems to have taken laudanum."[31] Julian Symons isolates striking descriptive passages in Bleak House and Great Expectations which he says create a surreal effect through the device of accumulated detail.[32] Juliet McMaster notes the surrealistic distortion both of Mr. Dolls as he is viewed through the odd collection of coloured bottles in the window of the doctor's shop in Our Mutual Friend, and, conversely, of the world viewed by Mr. Dolls through the same agency.[33] Similarly, U. C. Knoepflmacher makes an excellent examination of the "surrealistic fragmentation" of several characters' anatomies in the same novel.[34] Michael Hollington states that the illumination of Satis House in Great Expectations by wax candles that cast an artificial glow over everything creates an effect of "surreal colours."[35]

While my intent in this study is not to catalogue every critical reference to surrealism in Dickens's work, I would like to establish, through these preliminary examples, that a precedent exists to justify the perspective of surrealism as a valid critical viewpoint on many

aspects of Dickens's fiction. At the same time, I acknowledge the truth of Taylor Stoehr's observation in Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance that Dickens cannot properly be called a surrealist. Stoehr writes:

> I do not think of Dickens as a surrealist, not at least in the usual sense of that term. Most surrealists consciously imitate dreams (or think they do), and Dickens rarely does this, though an interesting passage in the letters muses on the possibility.[36]

However, surrealism is not strictly an imitation of dream; the broad sense of the term refers to fantastic and incongruous effects in art and literature which may be achieved through unnatural combinations and juxtapositions. It is in this broad sense that Dickens manifests surrealistic tendencies. To illustrate this point, I have chosen to examine three of Dickens's later novels--Bleak House, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend--a process which I hope will yield positive proof of Dickens's affinities with the surrealists in the probing of "the potentialities of feeling and imagination."[37]

CHAPTER I

BLEAK HOUSE

Bleak House, considered by many to be Dickens's finest novel, is a mosaic of mystery, deception and discovery. Submerged connections between the high and low of society--between Lady Dedlock and Jo, the crossings-sweep, for example, and between Krook and the Lord Chancellor of the Court of Chancery--provide drama and intrigue to this elaborate dissection of English society. Of central interest in this novel is the secret of Esther Summerson's birth which is revealed to the reader through clues which are often presented in a dreamy context. There is a stark, sinister element in the novel as well, particularly in the air of gothic mystery which enshrouds Lady Dedlock and in the otherworldly death-in-life characters such as Mr. Vholes, who is described in terms of a vampire, and Mr. Tulkinghorn, who is dry and passionless and who exhibits "a countenance as imperturbable as Death."[1] The dominant theme of deception and discovery in Bleak House may be represented, symbolically, by the image of the labyrinth. From the maze of the Court of Chancery, to the twisted streets of London, alive with a menagerie of house-fronts with human shapes (867) on the night that Esther accompanies Detective Bucket on his quest for Lady Dedlock, this society abounds with confusion, alienation and dead-ended channels of communication.

In the renowned opening chapter of Bleak House, Dickens uses several grotesque descriptions to set the tone for the entire novel.

His immediate object is to describe the weather, but the images he uses to do so are strangely distorted.

> As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes--gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun.

Dickens asks the reader to picture a landscape so unfamiliar and bizarre that the quantity of mud present in the streets is reminiscent of prehistoric times, and the sun is made invisible by the descent of large flakes of soot. The most striking and unusual physical characteristic in the scenery of this first chapter, however, is the ubiquitous fog.

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex Marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gun-wales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds. (49)

Fog is personified here as a creeping, hovering, cruel being which has the illusory power of being able to suspend one in midair. The dense fog enveloping the people on the bridge makes them look as though they are "hanging in the misty clouds"; in a sense, they are, because the fog acts as a cloud, blotting out their normal field of vision. Dickens's use of animism in these passages is, as Priscilla Gibson observes, "that striking development of the powers of realization and dramatization to

the point where the smoke lowers, the mud accumulates, the gas looms, and the fog creeps, hovers, droops"; it is, in essence, "the sign of a purely symbolic framework."[2] Dickens wants to firmly impress the reader with the pervasiveness and scope of fog in this scene because its symbolic relation to the thematic scheme of the novel is integral. In the course of Bleak House, Dickens demonstrates how the Court of Chancery is physically and symbolically enshrouded in a dense bank of fog. This institution, "most pestilent of hoary sinners," is depicted as being "at the very heart of the fog" (50). In fact, it might even be seen, figuratively, as generating the fog, for it obscures the light of reason and justice in this society.

Like the fog in which it is enshrouded, Chancery is impenetrable. The Lord Chancellor, who "can see nothing but fog," presides daily over the interminable suit Jarndyce and Jarndyce in a courtroom make dim by "wasting candles" and a "lantern that has no light in it." The absence of light and illumination in this court is both figurative and literal. It lacks sense and purpose, save where its own self-perpetuation is concerned. Chancery solicitors indiscriminately practice "tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horsehair warded heads against walls of word; and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might" (50-51). J. Hillis Miller, who calls Bleak House "a document about the interpretation of documents," notes that interpreters in the novel "for the most part are failures."[3] Expanding on this notion, Juliet McMaster states that "[w]ritten words, for the characters in the novel, seem to be like those in a dream, seen through a mist or a mirror, either meaningless or indecipherable."[4] Indeed, in the

collaborative interpretation of legal documents, Chancery lawyers are participants in an activity which may best be described as having the confused quality of a dream. On her initial visit to Chancery, Esther Summerson makes these observations on the proceedings which refer to Jarndyce and Jarndyce:

> I think it came on 'for further directions,'--about some bill of costs, to the best of my understanding, which was confused enough. But I counted twenty-three gentlemen in wigs, who said they were 'in it,' and none of them appeared to understand it much better than I. They chatted about it with the Lord Chancellor, and contradicted and explained among themselves, and some of them said it was this way, and some of them said it was that way, and some of them jocosely proposed to read huge volumes of affidavits, and there was more buzzing and laughing, and everybody concerned was in a state of idle entertainment, and nothing could be made of it by anybody. After an hour or so of this, and a good many speeches being begun and cut short, it was 'referred back for the present,' as Mr Kenge said, and the papers were bundled up again, before the clerks had finished bringing them in. (400-01)

In the Court of Chancery, words spoken and gestures enacted no longer signify any comprehensible meaning, even to the initiated. This court truly is "stuck in a fog-bank" (51): a fog-bank which simultaneously clouds sense and reason.

Dickens incorporates a surrealistic image of Chancery in the person of Krook, merchant of a rag and bottle shop. In absurd fashion, Krook's neighbours call him the Lord Chancellor and his shop the Court of Chancery.

> 'You see I have so many things here,' . . . 'of so many kinds, and all as the neighbours think (but <u>they</u> know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that's why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net. And I can't bear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbours think, but what do <u>they</u> know?) or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery. I don't mind. I go to see my noble and learned brother pretty well every day, when he

> sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle.' (101)

Krook's obsessive hoarding of wastepaper and assorted rubbish and his resistance to improving the condition of his shop qualify him as a "symbolic twin"[5] of the Lord Chancellor's. In "A Surreal Image in Bleak House: A Landlord and His Tenants," Christopher Mulvey states that Krook represents all lawyers in the novel, who,

> as they aspire to the rank of Lord Chancellor, aspire to the condition of Krook. His is a grubbing, mean possessiveness, touched with a cruelty embodied in Lady Jane, his cat. This grey symbol of the law stalks Miss Flite's birds and is "greedy for their lives." Krook's drudgery, with its overtones of sadism, can be seen in Mr. Tangle, the learned gentleman of chapter 1 who amuses the Court with the hopeless condition of the Jarndyce case; in Mr. Tulkinghorn, the greedy possessor of the lives and secrets of the great who plays cat-and-mouse with Lady Dedlock and the knowledge of her past; in Mr. Vholes, who seizes the last of Richard Carstone's hope and wealth and who watches the young man "as if he were looking at his prey and charming it" (ch. 37, p. [591]); in Mr. Guppy and his friend Jobling/Weevle, who, clerklike, ape the practice of Tulkinghorn in pursuit of Esther and her secret; in the unctuous self-indulgent Conversation Kenge, robbing his clients in his superficially gracious manner.[6]

In Krook, who resides in close proximity to the Court of Chancery, the evil traits of unscrupulous men of the legal profession are combined. Perhaps the most perverse aspect of his character is his dogged and blind ignorance. Although he is illiterate, he spends much time perusing discarded papers which he imagines are important legal documents. This fruitless pursuit mimics the occupation of Chancery lawyers who peruse real documents, yet never satisfactorily interpret them. Krook is an absurd caricature who not only represents the corruption of Chancery, but embodies it. He is a surreal image of the waste and decay that consume him. As Mulvey perceives: "A vitality of surreal vision makes flesh of Krook";[7] he is a grotesque, imaginative

illustration of what Chancery tends towards.

Krook's death by spontaneous combustion is a surreal event--an event which most properly belongs in the realm of the fantastic, an area in which Dickens was greatly interested. Curiously, however, Dickens makes a point of justifying the real existence of spontaneous human combustion in the preface to the first edition of Bleak House (42). His defence is not necessary since the effect of this unnatural phenomenon in the novel does not depend on whether such a thing is actually possible, but rather, on the reader's perception of its meaning. Bert Hornback suggests that Krook's death by spontaneous combustion is Dickens's symbolic answer to the problem of ridding England of Chancery, which cannot, in a novel, be accomplished realistically.[8] Indeed, when Dickens discusses the discovery of the remains of Krook's body, he makes it clear that Krook's unusual death is due him as a result of his pseudo kinship with the Lord Chancellor.

> Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is--is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? O Horror, he is here! and this from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another into the street, is all that represents him.
>
> Help, help, help! come into this house for Heaven's sake!
>
> Plenty will come in, but none can help. The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name Your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally--inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only--Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died. (511-12)

Since Krook's death substitutes for the death of Chancery, it is ironic that Mr. Boythorn boisterously proclaims that Chancery should be destroyed by means of a great explosion. Boythorn says: "'There never was such an infernal cauldron as that Chancery, on the face of the earth!'" He then adds:

> 'Nothing but a mine below it on a busy day in term time, with all its records, rules and precedents collected in it, and every functionary belonging to it also, high and low, upward and downward, from its son the Accountant-General to its father the Devil, and the whole blown to atoms with ten thousand hundredweight of gunpowder, would reform it in the least!' (169)

Krook's internal explosion, which satisfies, artistically, Boythorn's prescribed remedy for the evils of Chancery, conforms to the "realistic principle" which one of Dickens's critics, G. K. Chesterton, identifies in his work as "the principle that the most fantastic thing of all is often the precise fact."[9]

Dickens's ability to achieve surreal effects in his novels is due largely to his magnified attention to realistic detail. Mr. Guppy, for example, tries to determine from his friend, Mr. Weevle, what the sources of the falling soot and the dripping oil might be in Mr. Krook's establishment on the night of his spontaneous combustion.

> 'Why, Tony, what on earth is going on in this house tonight? Is there a chimney on fire?'
> 'Chimney on fire!'
> 'Ah!' returns Mr Guppy. 'See how the soot's falling. See here, on my arm! See again, on the table here! Confound the stuff, it won't blow off--smears, like black fat!' (505)

> 'What in the Devil's name,' he says, 'is this! Look at my fingers!'
> A thick, yellow liquor defiles them, which is offensive to the touch and sight and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it that makes them both shudder.
> 'What have you been doing here? What have you been pouring out of window?'

> 'I pouring out of window! Nothing, I swear! Never, since I have been here!' cries the lodger.
>
> And yet look here--and look here! When he brings the candle, here, from the corner of the window-sill, it slowly drips, and creeps away down the bricks; here, lies in a little thick nauseous pool. (509)

Guppy's attempts here to rationalise the presence of fatty soot and thick, yellow oil build suspense and foreshadow the horrible realisation that he and Weevle must make: that these vile physical elements are the earthly remains of Krook's body. As Julian Symons perceives, scenes like these in Dickens's novels are memorable because they present distortions which are achieved "through the illusion of photographic exactness."[10] The characterisation of Mr. Vholes is heightened through the use of the same technique. As Symons points out, Vholes's "office is created with the pathological exactness and excess of detail found in surrealist painting":

> Mr Vholes's office, in disposition retiring and in situation retired, is squeezed up in a corner, and blinks at a dead wall. Three feet of knotty-floored dark passage bring the client to Mr Vholes's jet black door, in an angle profoundly dark on the brightest midsummer morning, and encumbered by a black bulk-head of cellarage staircase, against which belated civilians generally strike their brows. Mr Vholes's chambers are on so small a scale, that one clerk can open the door without getting off his stool, while the other who elbows him at the same desk has equal facilities for poking the fire. A smell as of unwholesome sheep, blending with the smell of must and dust, is referable to the nightly (and often daily) consumption of mutton fat in candles, and to the fretting of parchment forms and skins in greasy drawers. The atmosphere is otherwise stale and close. The place was last painted or white-washed beyond the memory of man, and the two chimneys smoke, and there is a loose outer surface of soot everywhere, and the dull cracked windows in their heavy frames have but one piece of character in them, which is a determination to be always dirty and always shut, unless coerced. (603)[11]

Vholes's office is an extension of himself:

> a sallow man with pinched lips that looked as if they were cold, a red eruption here and there upon his face, tall and thin, about fifty years of age, high-shouldered, and stooping.

> Dressed in black, black-gloved, and buttoned to the chin, there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner, and a slow fixed way he had of looking at Richard. (589)

As Juliet McMaster observes, Vholes is a figure of darkness whose "notably 'lifeless manner' marks him as one of the undead, a kind of revenant, as his fixed gaze marks Richard as his source of nourishment."[12] Through "the accumulation of detail"[13] in these passages and others, then, Dickens creates a surreal effect: he suggests Vholes's "symbolic identity as a vampire."[14]

Juliet McMaster elaborates on Mr. Vholes's characterisation as a vampire. She cites the narrator's declaration "Make man-eating unlawful, and you starve the Vholeses!" (605) and the observation that Vholes is "always looking at the client, as if he were making a lingering meal of him with his eyes as well as with his professional appetite" (607) as clear images of Vholes's "feasting off humanity in general, and Richard in particular." McMaster also notes that, like Dracula, Vholes is unable to eat during the day.[15] In this light, the narrator's statement that Vholes's "digestion is impaired, which is highly respectable" (603) is a satirical comment, infused with black humour, on the professional standards of the legal profession in general. Finally, McMaster refers to Dickens's comparison of Vholes's desk to a coffin as further proof that Dickens's frame of reference is indeed the vampire legend.[16] Yet, in his characterisation of Mr. Vholes, Dickens does depart from the popular notion of what constitutes a vampire in one curious respect. The gothic horror that radiates from Mr. Vholes and casts a deathlike shadow on everything associated with him is at times chillingly and violently wrought upon himself, rather than exclusively upon others. Prior to an interview

with Richard, Mr. Vholes "takes off his close black gloves as if he were skinning his hands, lifts off his tight hat as if he were scalping himself, and sits down at his desk" (605). Dorothy Van Ghent observes that the "violent physical damage" that Mr. Vholes inflicts upon himself in this scene is the "kind of damage of which only the mediaeval and twentieth-century imaginations have been thought capable."[17]

Like Mr. Vholes, Mr. Tulkinghorn feasts off humanity as well: his "calling is the acquisition of secrets," and he thrives, like a parasite, on the "profit, privilege and reputation of being master of the mysteries of great houses" (567). Tulkinghorn's prey of choice is Lady Dedlock, who, as her name suggests, is emotionally locked in a dead world. In her intense desire to closely guard a great secret, Lady Dedlock represses her emotions beneath a very cool and prim exterior. The tension between these two characters is riveting, for, as the novel progresses, they become two phantoms, the pursuer and the pursued, each intently aware of the actions of the other, while pretending not to be so:

> Lady Dedlock is always the same exhausted deity, surrounded by worshippers, and terribly liable to be bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine. Mr Tulkinghorn is always the same speechless repository of noble confidence: so oddly out of place, and yet so perfectly at home. They appear to take as little note of one another, as any two people, enclosed within the same walls, could. But, whether each evermore watches and suspects the other, evermore mistrustful of some great reservation; whether each is evermore prepared at all points for the other, and never to be taken unawares; what each would give to know how much the other knows--all this is hidden, for the time, in their own hearts. (217)

A comment J. Hillis Miller makes on Dickens's earliest work, Sketches by Boz, is applicable to this passage. Miller, pointing out that in Sketches many characters pretend to be what they are not, remarks:

"theatrical gestures or speech are the signs not of a plenitude but of an absence. They have the hollowness of a mask."[18] Both Lady Dedlock and Mr. Tulkinghorn wear masks. Lady Dedlock tells Esther that beneath her "mask" she is wretched and conscience stricken (568); and Mr. Tulkinghorn, who prides himself on the secrecy of his soul, wears an "expressionless mask" (213). However, Lady Dedlock's mask crumbles after Mr. Tulkinghorn finally confronts her with his knowledge of her secret. Although she stoically refuses to betray her shock and terror as Mr. Tulkinghorn removes his own mask, revealing himself as her bitterest enemy, when he leaves, she unleashes a torrent of violent emotion. The scene in which Dickens contrasts Lady Dedlock's behaviour during her interview with Mr. Tulkinghorn with her behaviour after his departure is one of the most powerful in the novel:

> . . . she remains absorbed, but at length moves, and turns, unshaken in her natural and acquired presence, towards the door. Mr Tulkinghorn opens both the doors exactly as he would have done yesterday, or as he would have done ten years ago, and makes his old-fashioned bow as she passes out. It is not an ordinary look that he receives from the handsome face as it goes into the darkness, and it is not an ordinary movement, though a very slight one, that acknowledges his courtesy. But, as he reflects when he is left alone, the woman has been putting no common constraint upon herself.
>
> He would know it all the better, if he saw the woman pacing her own rooms with her hair wildly thrown from her flung back face, her hands clasped behind her head, her figure twisted as if by pain. He would think so all the more, if he saw the woman thus hurrying up and down for hours, without fatigue, without intermission, followed by the faithful step upon the Ghost's Walk. (638)

Mr. Tulkinghorn's mechanical courtesy towards Lady Dedlock and his underestimation of her self-restraint juxtaposed with a glimpse of the private turmoil of her soul is gothic in its horror. Lady Dedlock is at one moment so forcefully composed and in the next so completely shattered that she appears to be split into two different women.

Confirmed in the suspicion that she is at the mercy of Mr. Tulkinghorn, she is plunged into a living nightmare, tortured by the anxiety, guilt and shame which she is accustomed to repressing. Perhaps Dickens was haunted by the image of the Mask he was introduced to as a child because he recognised the inevitability of its removal, and the acute vulnerability of the person it hides. Lady Dedlock's mask is as fragile as the balance of her mind--once shattered, it cannot be restored.

Lady Dedlock has a dual nature: she is at once constrained and passionate. Like a gothic heroine, she projects the dark side of her nature, her passionate impulses, onto Hortense, her double. In Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance, Taylor Stoehr lists the similarities between the two women.

> They are lady and maid; each disguises herself in order to be mistaken for the other; each acts out of excessive pride, yet each finds herself a suppliant to Esther at some point in the novel (XXIII, XXXVI) Both hate Tulkinghorn, both visit his chambers on the fatal night . . . .[19]

In murdering Tulkinghorn, Hortense fulfills Lady Dedlock's desire to see him dead (815). This kind of surrealistic displacement is typical of dreams. In fact, Stoehr reads the whole novel as a dream. He states:

> Just as society and its laws by suppressing natural impulse and desire until they explode in unnatural violence, produce the spontaneous combustion that is the symbolic climax of the Chancery half of the novel, so in Lady Dedlock herself the pressure exerted by Tulkinghorn combined with her own characteristic restraint finally results in a murderous explosion of violence. For in a reading of the novel as dream, Lady Dedlock herself must be regarded as the murderess.[20]

Surrealism explores the world of psychological reality, and in that world, Lady Dedlock is Tulkinghorn's murderess. The despair she feels as a result of being anonymously accused of the crime, an accusation she knows circumstantial evidence supports, is so extreme that "she shudders

as if the hangman's hands were at her neck." Further, Dickens comments that "[t]he horror that is upon her, is unutterable. If she really were the murderess, it could hardly be, for the moment, more intense" (815). Lady Dedlock's characterisation adds weight to Christopher Herbert's belief that Dickens's exploration in literature of the subconscious mind prefigures the work of psychologists such as Freud. Freud, for example, conceived "a state of groundless guilt that . . . 'expresses itself as a need for punishment.'"[21] Even when Tulkinghorn is dead, Lady Dedlock is haunted by the belief

> that from this pursuer, living or dead--obdurate and imperturbable before her in his well-remembered shape, or not more obdurate and imperturbable in his coffin-bed--there is no escape but in death. Hunted, she flies. The complication of her shame, her dread, remorse, and misery, overwhelms her at its height; and even her strength of self-reliance is overturned and whirled away, like a leaf before a mighty wind. (816)

Lady Dedlock is a victim of her own guilt-ridden consciousness; in her flight from disgrace, she completes her surrealistic identity with Hortense, Tulkinghorn's actual murderess.

Dickens provides the reader with enough clues to unravel the mystery surrounding Lady Dedlock through the technique of the double narrative. At times he employs this technique surrealistically as the dual perspective he offers is that of dream and reality. As she tells her story, Esther is often like a dreamer watching the action of her own dream, unable to sort out its meaning or make plausible connections. One of the most striking occurrences of this is when she first sees Lady Dedlock, her mother. At that time, she has an unsettling vision, a moment of deja vu, which she describes as follows: "why her face should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps

of old remembrances; and why I should be so fluttered and troubled (for I was still), by having casually met her eyes; I could not think" (304). Although Esther considers the possibility that Lady Dedlock resembles her godmother, she is not satisfied with it. She adds:

> Neither did I know the loftiness and haughtiness of Lady Dedlock's face, at all, in any one. And yet I--I, little Esther Summerson, the child who lived a life apart, and on whose birthday there was no rejoicing--seemed to arise before my own eyes, evoked out of the past by some power in this fashionable lady, whom I not only entertained no fancy that I had ever seen, but whom I perfectly knew well I had never seen until that hour. (305)

Lady Dedlock, too, is haunted by the past in a brief scene described by the third-person narrator. At the time of her initial introduction in the novel, the reader is told that she is childless, and that upon

> looking out in the early twilight from her boudoir at a keeper's lodge, and seeing the light of a fire upon the latticed panes, and smoke rising from the chimney, and a child, chased by a woman, running out into the rain to meet the shining figure of a wrapped-up man coming through the gate, has been quite put out of temper. (56)

Lady Dedlock has seen a vision--fluid in texture and symbolic in nature--which in its animation is discordant both with the melancholy landscape and the languor of her melancholy mind. That she imagines that the shapes moving before her are not the keeper of the lodge and his family, but rather, the shadows of the family that should have been hers, is something that the reader understands in retrospect. Esther's dreamy vision of herself as a child (a response to a subconscious feeling of connection to Lady Dedlock), which defines Lady Dedlock's imaginative reconstruction of a real scene she witnesses, then, is one example of how dream and reality work together in Bleak House. Esther's vision is, at times, surreal; for, when in a dreamlike state, she is dimly aware of the reality which lies beyond the shadow of appearances.

Mr. Bucket, too, is endowed with surreal vision; he is a master of the unknown. In fact, he is a kind of magician, and his potent magic wand, in grotesquely humorous Dickensian fashion, is his own forefinger. As the investigation of the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn begins, the narrator writes:

> Mr. Bucket and his fat forefinger are much in consultation together under existing circumstances. When Mr. Bucket has a matter of this pressing interest under his consideration, the fat forefinger seems to rise to the dignity of a familiar demon. He puts it to his ears, and it whispers information; he puts it to his lips, and it enjoins him to secrecy; he rubs it over his nose, and it sharpens his scent; he shakes it before a guilty man, and it charms him to his destruction. The Augurs of the Detective Temple invariably predict, that when Mr. Bucket and that finger are in much conference, a terrible avenger will be heard of before long. (768)

In reference to the allegorical figure of the Roman painted on Mr. Tulkinghorn's ceiling which has been pointing from that ceiling with no apparent reason for years, Elliot Gose states that Mr. Bucket's determination to go to Mr. Tulkinghorn's chambers, where "he and the Roman will be alone together, comparing forefingers" (769), is "in the nature of a magician's attempt to discover the truth."[22] On the night he is commissioned by Sir Leicester Dedlock to search for Lady Dedlock, Bucket demonstrates his peculiar talents for discovery. His gift for seeing far beyond the normal scope of vision is thus illustrated on that occasion:

> [H]e mounts a high tower in his mind, and looks out far and wide. Many solitary figures he perceives, creeping through the streets; many solitary figures out on heaths, and roads, and lying under haystacks. But the figure that he seeks is not among them. Other solitaries he perceives in nooks of bridges, looking over; and in shadowed places down by the river's level; and a dark, dark, shapeless object drifting with the tide, more solitary than all, clings with a drowning hold on his attention. (824)

The detective uses his imagination--his dream faculty--to conjure up a vivid picture of the landscape he wishes to search and of the current movements of the people who inhabit it: his powers of perception are within the realm of the fantastic. Indeed, he seems to possess, at least mentally, the ability to be "in all manner of places, all at wunst" with which Jo credits him (690).

As she accompanies Mr. Bucket through "a labyrinth of streets" on his quest for Lady Dedlock, Esther experiences "the horror of a dream" (827). This sequence, one of the most dramatic in the novel, is extremely surrealistic. The shock of being abruptly awakened in the night to help save the life of Lady Dedlock, whom Esther has just recently learned is her mother, agitates and distorts her senses. She projects her turbulent emotional state onto the landscape, as a dreamer would. Her description of the river is particularly disturbing:

> The river had a fearful look, so overcast and secret, creeping away so fast between the low flat lines of shore: so heavy with indistinct and awful shapes, both of substance and shadow: so death-like and mysterious. I have seen it many times since then, by sunlight and by moonlight, but never free from the impression of that journey. In my memory, the lights upon the bridge are always burning dim; the cutting wind is eddying round the homeless woman whom we pass; the monotonous wheels are whirling on; and the light of the carriage-lamps reflected back, looks palely in upon me--a face, rising out of the dreaded water. (828)

Just as the "awful shapes" Esther sees in the river are "substance and shadow," so this whole description is substance and shadow, a composite of things seen and things imagined. In her intense preoccupation with her mother's fate, Esther associates fear, secrecy, flight, death and mystery with the river; she even sees a pale face which could be her mother's emerging from the dark water. These images reveal that Esther has a premonition of her mother's death, a premonition which is shaped

by her own imagination. This knowledge is surrealistic because it is hazy, undefined and vague, yet at the same time, unmistakable.

The importance of Esther's dreamy, shadowlike perceptions is underscored when she remarks, near the end of the journey, "that the unreal things were more substantial than the real." This follows some rather bizarre hallucinations that she experiences; one of particular note is her sense of water-gates opening and closing in her head (867). These imagined water-gates are just one example of a host of watery images in this section of the novel which, when combined, form an elaborate series of foreshadowings of the discovery of Lady Dedlock's dead body. The following passage, for example, figuratively describes Lady Dedlock's demise:

> There is no improvement in the weather. From the portico, from the eaves, from the parapet, from every ledge and post and pillar, drips the thawed snow. It has crept, as if for shelter, into the lintels of the great door--under it, into the corners of the windows, into every chink and crevice of retreat, and there wastes and dies. It is falling still; upon the roof, upon the skylight; even through the skylight, and drip, drip, drip, with the regularity of the Ghost's Walk, on the stone floor below. (855)

One can better understand the connection Dickens makes between Lady Dedlock and thawed snow, personified here as a being desperately seeking shelter in which to waste and die, when one considers a passage early in the novel in which Lady Dedlock's cool and rigid composure is described as a "freezing mood":

> How Alexander wept when he had no more worlds to conquer, everybody knows--or has some reason to know by this time, the matter having been rather frequently mentioned. My Lady Dedlock, having conquered <u>her</u> world, fell, not into the melting, but rather into the freezing mood. An exhausted composure, a worn-out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction, are the trophies of her victory. (57-58)

In Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, J. Hillis Miller cleverly perceives that Dickens's choice of adjectives here is significant. He cites the abundant use of water imagery in the chapters in which Lady Dedlock flees from disgrace as proof that her loss of the world she conquered causes her frozen state to thaw: she is now in the melting mood. Wet snow and sleet drench everything because her life, symbolically, is in the process of melting away. In bizarre fashion, nature mimics, and is a sign of, her ultimate downfall.[23] Dickens appears to suggest, then, that Esther's sense of watergates opening and closing in her head signifies her frantic attempt to save her mother's life, which she equates, symbolically, with trying to stop a flood. This surreal vision is indeed as substantial as Esther believes it to be, therefore, because it indicates her subconscious awareness of her mother's plight.

Although Esther's subconscious perceptions are acute, she is not able to consciously interpret their significance. She remains detached in a dreamlike reverie as she accompanies Mr. Bucket and Mr. Woodcourt to the burial ground where the men anticipate finding Lady Dedlock. This scene is an example of how Dickens uses surrealism in Bleak House to achieve great dramatic tension. Esther describes their terrible discovery in this way:

> At last we stood under a dark and miserable covered way, where one lamp was burning over an iron gate, and where the morning faintly struggled in. The gate was closed. Beyond it, was a burial ground--a dreadful spot in which the night was very slowly stirring; but where I could dimly see heaps of dishonoured graves and stones, hemmed in by filthy houses, with a few dull lights in their windows, and on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease. On the step at the gate, drenched in a fearful wet of such a place, which oozed and splashed down everything, I saw, with a cry of pity and horror, a woman lying--Jenny, the mother of the dead child. (867-68)

The presence of a closed gate here amidst dark and wet images of waste confirms the link between Esther's premonitions and the grisly discovery she is to make; but, while the reader recognises this, Esther does not. However, her assumption that the dead woman is Jenny is very significant. While Jenny's clothes, which Lady Dedlock wears, disguise or conceal her identity in a physical sense, they reveal, in a psychological and emotional sense, a deep affinity between the two women. Esther refers to Jenny as "the mother of the dead child," and, as J. Hillis Miller observes, Lady Dedlock is "herself the mother of a dead child, the child Esther might have been."[24] The confusion of identity which Lady Dedlock's disguise affords is like the confusion of a dream: Esther cannot, for the moment, penetrate through it. Mr. Bucket and Mr. Woodcourt try to ease the reality which Esther must acknowledge, but since she is isolated in a dreamy world, she is able neither to connect meaning with information they offer her nor understand her own sensory perceptions. Her rationalisation at this time is worth noting:

> I ran forward, but they stopped me, and Mr Woodcourt entreated me, with the greatest earnestness, even with tears, before I went up to the figure to listen for an instant to what Mr Bucket said. I did so, as I thought. I did so, as I am sure.
>
> 'Miss Summerson, you'll understand me, if you think a moment. They changed clothes at the cottage.'
>
> They changed clothes at the cottage. I could repeat the words in my mind, and I knew what they meant of themselves; but I attached no meaning to them in any other connection.
>
> 'And one returned,' said Mr Bucket, 'and one went on. And the one that went on, only went on a certain way agreed upon to deceive, and then turned across country, and went home. Think a moment!'
>
> I could repeat this in my mind too, but I had not the least idea what it meant. I saw before me, lying on the step, the mother of the dead child. She lay there, with one arm creeping round a bar of the iron gate, and seeming to embrace it. She lay there, who had so lately spoken to my mother.

> She lay there, a distressed, unsheltered, senseless creature. She who had brought my mother's letter, who could give me the only clue to where my mother was; she, who was to guide us to rescue and save her whom we had sought so far, who had come to this condition by some means connected with my mother that I could not follow, and might be passing beyond our reach and help at that moment; she lay there, and they stopped me! I saw, but did not comprehend, the solemn and compassionate look in Mr Woodcourt's face. I saw, but did not comprehend, his touching the other on the breast to keep him back. I saw him stand uncovered in the bitter air, with a reverence for something. But my understanding for all this was gone.
>
> I even heard it said between them:
>
> 'Shall she go?'
>
> 'She had better go. Her hands should be the first to touch her. They have a higher right than ours.'
>
> I passed on to the gate, and stooped down. I lifted the heavy head, put the long dank hair aside, and turned the face. And it was my mother, cold and dead. (868-69)

Paradoxically, Esther's disconnection in this scene is extremely realistic and plausible and is a convincing method for building suspense. Dickens recognised that dreams and dream states are an important part of real life, and he knew their value for creating drama in fiction.

In Bleak House, Dickens confounds ordinary notions of reality. He criticises the foggy realism of the Court of Chancery which is embodied in complex legal procedure and endless, circuitous interpretation of legal documents. Chancery is depicted as a dry world, a wasteland where language and communication are withered, sterile instruments. Opposed to the realism of Chancery, Dickens illustrates the realism of the imagination. Surreal elements such as Krook's spontaneous combustion and Esther's somnambulism belong in the realm of the fantastic, yet, in the scope of the novel, are more tangible than the workings of Chancery. Dickens's use of surrealism in Bleak House demonstrates the superb range of his creative genius, and illustrates his belief that reality is often discovered in the unusual and in the bizarre.

CHAPTER II

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In Great Expectations, as in Bleak House, a mystery, in this case that of the unknown identity of Pip's benefactor, is of key importance. As he wrote Great Expectations, Dickens was consciously building upon a certain "grotesque tragi-comic conception."[1] Donald Fanger states that "[t]he conception is that of the concealed connection of Pip's rise in the world with Magwitch the convict."[2] Shortly after his first contact with Magwitch, Pip begins to harbor a seemingly inexplicable burden of guilt, as if he himself were the criminal. Pip's guilty conscience is referable, however, not to his connection with Magwitch, but to his own monstrous ambition. The deranged and bizarre Miss Havisham fits well into the grotesque scheme of the novel,[3] especially since she comes to represent the spiritual waste and decay that result from Pip's great expectations.

In the passage from Great Expectations quoted below, Pip describes the terrible desperation and fear he feels as a child after having made a pact of secrecy with Magwitch.

> I have often thought that few people know what secrecy there is in the young, under terror. No matter how unreasonable the terror, so that it be terror. I was in mortal terror of the young man who wanted my heart and liver; I was in mortal terror of my interlocutor with the iron leg; I was in mortal terror of myself, from whom an awful promise had been extracted; I had no hope of deliverance through my all-powerful sister, who repulsed me at every turn; I am afraid to think of what I might have done on requirement, in the secrecy of my terror.[4]

The secrecy of his terror causes Pip to experience hallucinations and altered perceptions of familiar surroundings. Surreal impressions such as the following haunt him:

> It was a rimy morning, and very damp. I had seen the damp lying on the outside of my little window, as if some goblin had been crying there all night, and using the window for a pocket-handkerchief. Now I saw the damp lying on the bare hedges and spare grass, like a coarser sort of spiders' webs, hanging itself from twig to twig and blade to blade. On every rail and gate, wet lay clammy, and the marsh-mist was so thick that the wooden finger on the post directing people to our village--a direction which they never accepted, for they never came there--was invisible to me until I was quite close under it. Then, as I looked up at it, while it dripped, it seemed to my oppressed conscience like a phantom devoting me to the hulks.
>
> The mist was heavier yet when I got out upon the marshes, so that instead of my running at everything, everything seemed to run at me. This was very disagreeable to a guilty mind. The gates and dykes and banks came bursting at me through the mist, as if they cried as plainly as could be, "A boy with somebody-else's pork pie! Stop him!" The cattle came upon me with like suddenness, staring out of their eyes, and steaming out of their nostrils, "Halloa, young thief!" One black ox, with a white cravat on--who even had to my awakened conscience something of a clerical air--fixed me so obstinately with his eyes, and moved his blunt head round in such an accusatory manner as I moved round, that I blubbered out to him, "I couldn't help it, sir! It wasn't for myself I took it!" Upon which he put down his head, blew a cloud of smoke out of his nose, and vanished with a kick-up of his hind legs and a flourish of his tail. (15)

The wet, misty images here are particularly striking because they connect with a nightmare Pip has where he imagines that he is drifting down the river to the hulks, and, as he passes the gibbet-station, a ghostly pirate beckons him to "come ashore and be hanged there at once" (13). Significantly, Pip imagines that the damp on the hedges and grass looks like "hanging" spiders' webs, and he feels that the mist-enveloped fingerpost, like the pirate, directs him to the hulks. In his childish innocence, Pip believes he is doomed to the hulks because he agrees to aid Magwitch and because his sister suggests that such a fate could

possibly befall him (13). Priscilla Gibson notes of this episode: "The habit of seeing animistically admirably characterizes the imaginative sensitivity and state of mind of the boy Pip."[5] His hallucinations are symbolic manifestations of his terror.

The misty world of the marshes is greatly conducive to the air of secrecy under which Pip's terror thrives. G. K. Chesterton writes that "it is characteristic of Dickens that his atmospheres are more important than his stories." In reference to the "atmosphere of mystery and wrong, such as that which gathers round Mrs. Clennam, rigid in her chair, or old Miss Havisham, ironically robbed as a bride," he states: "The secrecy is sensational; the secret is tame."[6] The atmosphere surrounding Miss Havisham is sensational because it is ghostly and surreal. She has created a bizarre world within the confines of Satis House--a world of decay and stagnation in which time has artificially been frozen. Pip calls Miss Havisham "the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see" and he recalls making these observations upon meeting her for the first time:

> She was dressed in rich materials--satins, and lace, and silks--all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on--the other was on the table near her hand--her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a prayer-book, all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass.
>
> It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung

> loose had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could. (55-56)

Miss Havisham is suspended between two worlds: the world of the past, in which she perpetually awaits her bridegroom; and the world of the present, in which she is perpetually tortured by the knowledge that he will not arrive. Her manipulation of time creates an unearthly illusion: it makes her appear like a ghost of the past haunting the present, unable to exist fully in either domain. In the following, Pip explains that it is Miss Havisham's defiance of the laws of time that determines the surreality of the atmosphere that clings to her:

> I began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock, a long time ago. I noticed that Miss Havisham put down the jewel exactly on the spot from which she had taken it up. As Estella dealt the cards, I glanced at the dressing-table again, and saw that the shoe upon it, once white, now yellow, had never been worn. I glanced down at the foot from which the shoe was absent, and saw that the silk stocking on it, once white, now yellow, had been trodden ragged. Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud. (58)

Miss Havisham is a death-in-life figure who marginally exists in a "dark and airless room whose silent timepieces symbolize the paralysis of activity and life."[7] The timelessness which characterises Satis House is the timelessness of a recurring nightmare: it is a construct of a troubled imagination.

Michael Hollington relates the surreality of Satis House to a specific aspect of its timelessness, namely, absence of natural light.

The wax candles which burn there, illuminating ghastly objects, create what Hollington calls "the surreal colours of Satis House"[8]--an effect which is especially apparent in the description of the room in which Miss Havisham's wedding feast was once to have taken place:

> From that room . . . the daylight was completely excluded, and it had an airless smell that was oppressive. A fire had been lately kindled in the damp old-fashioned grate, and it was more disposed to go out than to burn up, and the reluctant smoke which hung in the room seemed colder than the clearer air--like our own marsh mist. Certain wintry branches of candles on the high chimney-piece faintly lighted the chamber; or, it would be more expressive to say, faintly troubled its darkness. It was spacious, and I dare say had once been handsome, but every discernible thing in it was covered with dust and mould, and dropping to pieces. The most prominent object was a long table with a table-cloth spread on it, as if a feast had been in preparation when the house and the clocks all stopped together. An epergne or centre-piece of some kind was in the middle of this cloth; it was so heavily overhung with cobwebs that its form was quite undistinguishable; and, as I looked along the yellow expanse out of which I remember its seeming to grow like a black fungus, I saw speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies running home to it, and running out from it, as if some circumstance of the greatest public importance had just transpired in the spider community. (82-83)

Julian Symons notes the surreal quality of Satis House as well but he attributes it to Dickens's technique, rather than to what is actually described. Referring to this scene, he states: "Dickens employs the method of surrealist painting, by describing the fantastic shapes and figures that occupy his mind in the soberest tones of naturalism."[9] Miss Havisham's fungus-like wedding cake, in particular, is described in natural terms, but it represents something totally unnatural and bizarre. Dorothy Van Ghent perceives that "the decayed wedding cake offers a supplementary image of the necrosis that is taking place in the human agent."[10]

Just as Miss Havisham creates an imaginary world for herself, Pip creates an imaginary world for himself as well. Pip's imaginative world is not tangible as Miss Havisham's is, however. Her world is nightmarish and bizarre, a crystallised vision of the torment of her soul. Pip, on the other hand, imagines a dream world which he believes in wholeheartedly but which he is powerless to manifest. Taylor Stoehr says of Great Expectations that "the whole structure of the plot depends on the interplay of meanings at the level of dream. Pip's story from beginning to end is both a sequence of events that happen to him and a projection into actuality of his own desires and fears."[11] Pip wants to be a gentleman so that he may be on equal terms with Estella. This desire is so great that it changes his life forever. The change is not visible--it is a change in Pip's state of mind. He says the following of the day he is introduced at Satis House:

> That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day. (70)

The long chain which binds Pip to Estella may be said to be made of thorns because while Pip dreams of her so constantly that he begins to feel a surreal connection to her, the star imagery associated with her confirms the fact that she will never be within his reach. In a passage somewhat reminiscent of the illusionary visions which Heathcliff sees of the dead Catherine in Wuthering Heights,[12] Pip describes seeing visions of Estella's face at one of the windows in Joe Gargery's forge:

> What I dreaded was that in some unlucky hour I, being at my grimiest and commonest, should lift up my eyes and see Estella looking in at one of the wooden windows of the forge. I was haunted by the fear that she would, sooner or later, find me

> out, with a black face and hands, doing the coarsest part of my work, and would exult over me and despise me. Often after dark, when I was pulling the bellows for Joe, and we were singing Old Clem, and when the thought how we used to sing it at Miss Havisham's would seem to show me Estella's face in the fire, with her pretty hair fluttering in the wind and her eyes scorning me--often at such a time I would look towards those panels of black night in the wall which the wooden windows then were, and would fancy that I saw her just drawing her face away, and would believe that she had come at last. (106)

When Pip begins to lead the life of a young man with great expectations, his surreal connection to Estella grows even more intense. His life becomes a waking dream in which Estella is embodied in every aspect of his existence: she is "on the river, on the sails of the ships, on the marshes, in the clouds, in the light, in the darkness, in the wind, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets." Her presence and influence, which continually shadow his life, are as real to him, he says, as the "stones of which the strongest London buildings are made" (358).

Pip's feelings, intuitions and imaginative perceptions are indeed as concrete as the material and physical world. His description of the weather on the night that Magwitch returns and makes himself known as his benefactor reflects a surreal foreknowledge of Magwitch's approach:

> It was wretched weather; stormy and wet, stormy and wet; mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets. Day after day, a vast heavy veil had been driving over London from the east, and it drove still, as if in the east there were an eternity of cloud and wind. So furious had been the gusts that high buildings in town had had the lead stripped off their roofs; and in the country, trees had been torn up, and sails of windmills carried away; and gloomy accounts had come in from the coast, of shipwreck and death. Violent blasts of rain had accompanied these rages of wind, and the day just closed as I sat down to read had been the worst of all.
>
> . . . the wind rushing up the river shook the house that night, like discharges of cannon, or breakings of a sea. When the rain came with it and dashed against the windows, I thought, raising my eyes to them as they rocked, that I might have fancied myself in a storm-beaten lighthouse. (309-10)

The terrible upheaval in nature that Pip recalls here prefigures a terrible upheaval in his life--the discovery that the convict to whom he had rendered aid out on the muddy marshes many years earlier is the author of his great expectations. Two images in particular suggest that while Pip speaks of the weather, Magwitch is present in his subconscious mind. First, he perceives that the rushing of the wind shakes the house that night "like discharges of cannon," as if the wind means to signal that there is a convict at large; and second, he visualises himself "in a storm-beaten lighthouse"--a point of refuge and a beacon to travellers, especially one traveller, to wit, Magwitch.

In retrospect, Pip recognises that Magwitch's approach has been mysteriously foreshadowed not only on that stormy night, but also for many weeks prior to it:

> I began either to imagine or recall that I had had mysterious warnings of this man's approach. That, for weeks gone by, I had passed faces in the streets which I had thought like his. That these likenesses had grown more numerous, as he, coming over the sea, had drawn nearer. That his wicked spirit had somehow sent these messengers to mine, and that now on this stormy night he was as good as his word, and with me. (319-20)

Although Pip expresses doubt in the phrase "I began either to imagine or recall," there is, in fact, real foundation to the "mysterious warnings" he now either remembers or conceives. Dorothy Van Ghent offers the following insight:

> The multiplying likenesses in the street as Magwitch draws nearer, coming over the sea, the mysterious warnings of his approach on the night of his reappearance, are moral projections as real as the storm outside the windows and as the crouched form of the vicious Orlick on the dark stairs.[13]

Van Ghent credits Pip's subconscious and imaginative faculties, which are surrealistically expressed, as being as valid as the observable

physical world. Even if Pip creates the past out of what happens to him in the present, there is reality in that creation because it represents a psychological truth. As in a dream, Pip suddenly realises the existence, in his subconscious mind, of a deep-rooted and spiritual connection to Magwitch. It is through this connection that Pip is forewarned of Magwitch's return; the "mysterious warnings," then, are real; the medium through which they are revealed is surreal.

Another surrealistic element in Great Expectations is the animation of inanimate objects, which occurs everywhere in Dickens's novels. On the night that Wemmick directs a note to Pip warning him not to go home, Pip takes a room at the Hummums and there witnesses, or imagines he witnesses, some rather strange phenomena. The bed he is assigned to sleep in is "a despotic monster . . . straddling over the whole place, putting one of his arbitrary legs into the fireplace, and another into the doorway, and squeezing the wretched little washing-stand in quite a divinely righteous manner." The bullying manner of the bed is reinforced by a second object, a rush-light, which Pip describes as

> an object like the ghost of a walking-cane, which instantly broke its back if it were touched, which nothing could ever be lighted at, and which was placed in solitary confinement at the bottom of a high tin tower perforated with round holes that made a staringly wide-awake pattern on the walls. When I had got into bed, and lay there, footsore, weary, and wretched, I found that I could no more close my own eyes than I could close the eyes of this foolish Argus. And thus, in the gloom and death of the night, we stared at one another.

Indeed, there seems to be a conspiracy afoot to increase the agitation of Pip's nerves, for he also hears distinct sounds being spontaneously emitted from several inanimate sources: "The closet whispered, the fireplace sighed, the little washing-stand ticked, and one guitar-string played occasionally in the chest of drawers"; and he sees that "the eyes

on the wall acquired a new expression, . . . DON'T GO HOME" (361-62). Curiously, Pip's anxiety over the significance of being warned not to go home energises the objects which surround him. G. K. Chesterton refers to Dickens's ability to endow inanimate objects with "demoniac life" as the creation of an "elvish kind of realism"--"the unbearable realism of a dream."[14] The host of knowing, animated articles which surround Pip are artistic creations which suit a specific purpose: the imaginative illustration of Pip's state of mind.

Pip is characterised most fully, however, in the unfolding of his relationship with Magwitch, a relationship which is tinged with gothic overtones. In fact, as R. D. McMaster points out, Dickens subtly compares their relationship to that which exists between Frankenstein and the monster he creates in Mary Shelley's classic gothic tale.[15] Pip makes an allusion to Frankenstein as feelings of horror overwhelm him at the thought of having been created, in a sense, by Magwitch:

> I doubt if a ghost could have been more terrible to me, up in those lonely rooms in the long evenings and long nights, with the wind and the rain always rushing by. A ghost could not have been taken and hanged on my account, and the consideration that he could be, and the dread that he would be, were no small addition to my horrors. When he was not asleep, or playing a complicated kind of patience with a ragged pack of cards of his own--a game that I never saw before or since, and in which he recorded his winnings by sticking his jack-knife into the table--when he was not engaged in either of these pursuits, he would ask me to read to him--"Foreign language, dear boy!" While I complied, he, not comprehending a single word, would stand before the fire surveying me with the air of an exhibitor, and I would see him, between the fingers of the hand with which I shaded my face, appealing in dumb show to the furniture to take notice of my proficiency. The imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made was not more wretched than I, pursued by the creature who had made me, and recoiling from him with a stronger repulsion the more he admired me and the fonder he was of me. (332-33)

In Frankenstein, Shelley employs the technique of the doppelganger to illuminate the dark side of Frankenstein's character. Frankenstein's monster is an extension of himself--an incarnation of repressed traits within his own subconscious mind. Pip, too, of whom Magwitch boasts, "'[T]his is the gentleman what I made!'" (325), is a monstrous creation. While Dickens uses the doppelganger technique with respect to Pip and Magwitch, he employs it with a unique twist: he uses it not as a method for delving into the creator's subconscious, but rather, as a means of labelling the created being, Pip, a monster. Unjustly, though, Pip perceives Magwitch as a monstrous and repulsive figure, doubly so when he reflects that it was for him, not Miss Havisham and Estella, that he agreed to be separated from his best friends in return for great expectations:

> Miss Havisham's intentions towards me, all a mere dream; Estella not designed for me; I only suffered in Satis House as a convenience, a sting for the greedy relations, a model with a mechanical heart to practise on when no other practice was at hand; those were the first smarts I had. But--sharpest and deepest pain of all--it was for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes, and liable to be taken out of those rooms where I sat thinking, and hanged at the Old Bailey door, that I had deserted Joe.
>
> I would not have gone back to Joe now, I would not have gone back to Biddy now, for any consideration--simply, I suppose, because my sense of my own worthless conduct to them was greater than every consideration. No wisdom on earth could have given me the comfort that I should have derived from their simplicity and fidelity; but I could never, never, never, undo what I had done. (319)

Pip's intense guilt here and his belief that he can never undo what he has done are expressions of a deeply complicated psychological framework in which he is indeed as monstrous as his own identification with Frankenstein's monster suggests. In an excellent article entitled "The Hero's Guilt: The Case of Great Expectations," Julian Moynahan examines

the seemingly inordinate sense of guilt that tortures Pip throughout the course of the novel. He remarks that

> Pip is Dickens's most complicated hero, demonstrating at once the traits of criminal and gull, of victimiser and victim. He is victimised by his dream and the dream itself, by virtue of its profoundly anti-social and unethical nature, forces him into relation with a world in which other human beings fall victim to his drive for power. He is, in short, a hero sinned against and sinning: sinned against because in the first place the dream was thrust upon the helpless child by powerful and corrupt figures from the adult world; a sinner because in accepting for himself a goal in life based upon unbridled individualism and indifference to others he takes up a career which Great Expectations repeatedly, through a variety of artistic means, portrays as essentially criminal.[16]

The focal point of Moynahan's article is that Pip, who admits to being "encompassed by . . . [the] taint of prison and crime" (260), is directly connected to the "criminal milieu" of the novel, and implicitly participates in the many acts of violence which occur in it.[17] In support of this argument, Moynahan identifies the criminal Orlick as Pip's double or shadow, citing several uncanny connections between them which, when considered aggregately, suggest that they share a fundamental unity. The most significant of these connections is their implied conspiracy in the assault on Mrs. Joe. Pip eventually suspects that Orlick is the one who bludgeoned his sister, yet, curiously, his first reaction to the crime is that he himself must be partly responsible for it:

> I was at first disposed to believe that I must have had some hand in the attack upon my sister, or at all events that as her near relation, popularly known to be under obligations to her, I was a more legitimate object of suspicion than any one else. (118)

Pip focuses this vague feeling of culpability when he realises that, in a sense, he provided his sister's attacker with the would-be murder weapon (119). Orlick confirms that Pip did indeed provide the weapon,

but he is not thinking of the convict's leg-iron, but rather, himself. He presents himself to Pip as the mere instrument by which Pip, in fact, committed the crime:

> 'I tell you it was your doing--I tell you it was done through you,' he retorted, catching up the gun and making a blow with the stock at the vacant air between us. 'I come upon her from behind, as I come upon you to-night. I giv' it to her! I left her for dead, and if there had been a limekiln as nigh her as there is now nigh you, she shouldn't have come to life again. But it warn't old Orlick as did it; it was you. You was favoured, and he was bullied and beat. Old Orlick bullied and beat, eh? Now you pays for it. You done it; now you pays for it.' (421-22)

Moynahan states that this scene is imbued with a "nightmare quality" which "is at least partly due to the weird reversal of rôles, by which the innocent figure is made the accused and the guilty one the accuser. As in a dream the situation is absurd, yet like a dream it may contain hidden truth."[18] Orlick's seemingly outlandish accusations which Moynahan suggests may contain hidden truth blend well into the overall pattern of the text in which the link between Pip and Orlick, in typical Dickensian fashion, is concealed. Moynahan states further that the only clue that the two are doubles which Dickens offers at the surface level of the narrative is Pip's obsession with criminal guilt. This obsession, which stems from Pip's belief that he is tainted by crime, is grounded only when one recognises "in the insensate and compunctionless Orlick a shadow image of the tender-minded and yet monstrously ambitious young hero."[19]

In the course of Great Expectations, Dickens demonstrates, through the use of dream patterns and analogies, the destructive power which Pip generates as a result of his ambitious quest for the realisation of his desires. To briefly paraphrase some key points in Moynahan's article,

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the characters in the novel who thwart, in some measure, the fulfillment of Pip's great expectations are punished accordingly. Mrs. Joe is viciously attacked by Orlick, whose only motive in doing so is her provocation of a quarrel between himself and Joe. This motive, however, is almost nonexistent in comparison with that which Pip surely entertains. Pip, more than anyone else, has good reason to wish harm upon his sister, for, in her role as his guardian, she has inflicted a lifetime of cruelty--both mental and physical--upon him.

Mr. Pumblechook, who, like Mrs. Joe, is held up to Pip as a figure of authority, is also victimised by Orlick, but to a much lesser degree. In return for his many canting, hypocritical speeches to Pip, Mr. Pumblechook has his house burglarised by Orlick, during which invasion, Orlick also stuffs Pumblechook's mouth with flowering annuals. As Moynahan points out, Pumblechook's punishment, which is relatively minor, "is nicely proportioned to his nuisance value for Pip." Estella, who tortures Pip incessantly with her cold behaviour towards him, is brutally treated by Bentley Drummle, who usurps Pip's cherished and longed-for place as Estella's husband. Once again, an Orlick-like figure participates in Pip's surrogate revenge, for, upon close examination, Orlick and Drummle are "functional equivalents." Both men are "physically powerful, inarticulate and dark-complexioned villains," and both are wont to lurk in the shadows. Both disappear quickly from the text after they perform their duties as Pip's "vengeful surrogates," and, with the exception of Orlick's arrest for the looting of Mr. Pumblechook's house, neither is duly punished for the crimes they commit in the novel. Orlick's case, in particular, Moynahan concludes, "needs no final disposition because he has only existed, essentially, as

an aspect of the hero's own far more problematic case."[20] In "Surrealization and the Redoubled Self: Fantasy in David Copperfield and Pendennis," Carol Hanbery MacKay states that "Dickens' world resembles a dream, a phantasmagoria of suppressed emotions which are 'surrealized.'" MacKay identifies James Steerforth and Uriah Heep as David Copperfield's "shadow selves." She sees them not as real characters but as "surrealized versions" of David's self onto whom he projects repressed emotions.[21] In the same vein, the surrealistic expression of Pip's psychological framework through the presentation of Orlick as his "distorted and darked mirror-image" is a powerful method of characterisation. Indeed, as Moynahan perceives, in his exploration of the manifestation of Pip's poisonous ambition, Dickens anticipates "the more sophisticated probings of novelists like Dostoevsky and Gide."[22]

Miss Havisham's punishment for the many wrongs she perpetuates against Pip, particularly for fostering his belief that she is responsible for his great expectations, deserves special consideration. Ironically, Pip thinks of Miss Havisham as his "fairy godmother" (155), although she is really, as her name implies, a mere "sham" or imposter of the benevolent figure Pip supposes her to be. In a striking surrealistic scene early in the novel, Pip sees an illusion which foreshadows Miss Havisham's demise by violent means:

> I turned my eyes--a little dimmed by looking up at the frosty light--towards a great wooden beam in a low nook of the building near me on my right hand, and I saw a figure hanging there by the neck. A figure all in yellow white, with but one shoe to the feet; and it hung so that I could see that the faded trimmings of the dress were like earthy paper, and that the face was Miss Havisham's, with a movement going over the whole countenance as if she were trying to call to me. In the terror of seeing the figure, and in the terror of being certain that it had not been there a moment before, I at first ran from it, and then ran towards it. And my terror was greatest of all when I found no figure there. (62)

In this brief moment, Pip reveals feelings of both repulsion from and attraction towards Miss Havisham. Strangely, he also appears to understand intuitively that she, unlike a true fairy godmother, requires him to save her in some respect. This deep understanding is a premonition of an event which takes place near the end of the novel when Pip's dreams of great expectations have been shattered and he realises that Miss Havisham is a deeply disturbed and ruined woman who has irrevocably hurt him and changed the course of his life forever. He rescues her from a raging fire but his efforts, which appear valiant, are merely mechanical. Pip is not conscious of extinguishing the flames which engulf Miss Havisham because he is in a kind of trance or dreamlike state. As he explains:

> . . . that we were on the ground struggling like desperate enemies, and that the closer I covered her, the more wildly she shrieked and tried to free herself; that this occurred, I knew through the result, but not through anything I felt, or thought, or knew I did. (397)

Pip's actions, like any dreamer's, are spontaneous and symbolic. He goes through the motions of saving Miss Havisham, but his intent is actually to destroy her, as his wild and violent struggle with her on the ground reveals. In this light, Moynahan sees Pip's childhood hallucination, which recurs immediately before Miss Havisham's accident, as "an imaginative fantasy which both projects and disguises the boy's desire to punish [Miss Havisham] and to destroy her baleful power over him." Moynahan concludes that

> [b]ecause Pip's destructive fantasy comes true in reality, he experiences the equivalent of a murderer's guilt. As though he had the evil eye, or as though there were more than a psychological truth in the old cliche, 'if looks could kill,' Pip moves from the brewery, where he has seen Miss Havisham hanging, to the door of her room, where he gives her one long, last look--until she is consumed by fire. But here the

> psychological truth suffices to establish imaginative proof that Pip can no more escape untainted from his relationship to the former patroness than he can escape untainted from any of his relationships to characters who have held and used the power to destroy or hamper his ambitious struggles. In all these relationships the hero becomes implicated in violence. With Estella, Pumblechook, and Mrs. Joe, the aggressive drive is enacted by surrogates linked to the hero himself by ties of analogy. With Miss Havisham the surrogate is missing. Miss Havisham falls victim to the purely accidental. But the 'impurity' of Pip's motivation, as it is revealed through the device of the recurrent hallucination, suggests an analogy between that part of Pip which wants Miss Havisham at least punished, at most removed from this earth for which she is so profoundly unfit, and the destroying fire itself.[23]

Miss Havisham's demise, which is both concrete and symbolic, signals the end of Pip's great expectations. As Taylor Stoehr points out, the episode in which fire engulfs and eventually destroys her is reminiscent of the spontaneous combustion of Krook in Bleak House:

> In her symbolic death by fire Miss Havisham is consumed by her own inward decay. She has destroyed herself, as Pip's hallucination, when he sees her hanging, must imply. The desiccated wedding garments, symbols of her vanity, are all that is left of her; and they explode almost spontaneously, so that we are reminded of Krook's fate in Bleak House.[24]

Like Mr Krook, Miss Havisham is a figure of waste--a symbol of ruin and decay. She functions in the novel as a ghostly and surreal representative of the spiritual waste of Pip's great expectations. Her self-destruction is inevitable just as Pip's disenchantment with her is inevitable as well. Pip's mental reference to her as his "fairy godmother" (154) proves to be bitterly ironic; yet, at the same time, there is an appropriateness in this appellation inasmuch as it suggests a surreal correspondence between Miss Havisham and the supernatural world. In the passage from "The Hero's Guilt: The Case of Great Expectations" quoted above, Moynahan alludes to Pip's belief in Miss Havisham's "profound unfitness for this earth" (394) as a

subconscious desire to see her dead. In a more basic sense, Miss Havisham is simply a creature not of this earth. Her half brother, Arthur, attests to witnessing and experiencing proof of her supernatural capacities, when, as Magwitch recalls, he reports being haunted by her:

> ". . . The second or third time as ever I see him, he come a-tearing down into Compeyson's parlour late at night, in only a flannel gown, with his hair all in a sweat, and he says to Compeyson's wife, 'Sally, she really is upstairs alonger me, now, and I can't get rid of her. She's all in white,' he says, 'wi' white flowers in her hair, and she's awful mad, and she's got a shroud hanging over her arm, and she says she'll put it on me at five in the morning.'
>
> "Says Compeyson: 'Why, you fool, don't you know she's got a living body? And how should she be up there without coming through the door, or in at the window, and up the stairs?'
>
> "'I don't know how she's there,' says Arthur, shivering dreadful with the horrors, 'but she's standing in the corner at the foot of the bed, awful mad. And over where her heart's broke--you broke it!--there's drops of blood.'
>
> "Compeyson spoke hardy, but he was always a coward. 'Go up alonger this drivelling sick man,' he says to his wife, 'and Magwitch, lend her a hand, will you?' But he never come nigh himself.
>
> "Compeyson's wife and me took him up to bed agen, and he raved most dreadful. 'Why look at her!' he cries out. 'She's a-shaking the shroud at me! Don't you see her? Look at her eyes! Ain't it awful to see her so mad?' Next, he cries, 'She'll put it on me, and then I'm done for! Take it away from her, take it away!' and then he catched hold of us, and kep on a-talking to her, and answering of her, till I half-believed I see her myself.
>
> "Compeyson's wife, being used to him, give him some liquor to get the horrors off, and by-and-by he quieted. 'Oh, she's gone! Has her keeper been for her?' he says. 'Yes,' says Compeyson's wife. 'Did you tell him to lock and bar her in?' 'Yes.' 'And to take that ugly thing away from her?' 'Yes, yes, all right.' 'You're a good creetur,' he says, 'don't leave me, whatever you do and thank you!'
>
> "He rested pretty quiet till it might want a few minutes of five, and then he starts up with a scream, and screams out, 'Here she is! She's got the shroud again. She's unfolding it. She's coming out of the corner. She's coming to the bed. Hold me, both on you--one of each side--don't let her touch me with it. Hah! She missed me that time. Don't let her throw it over my shoulders. Don't let her lift me up to get it round me. She's lifting me up. Keep me down!' Then he lifted himself up hard, and was dead." (343-44)

Several points in Magwitch's narrative suggest that there is substance in Arthur's mad ravings. First, Arthur is rather fit for a dying man: he "tears" from the top of Compeyson's house down into the parlour, as if he truly has seen a ghost. Second, Arthur is accurate in his description of his half sister's dress: he says that she is "all in white . . . wi' white flowers in her hair." Third, if Miss Havisham has not somehow communicated to Arthur her intention of placing a shroud over him at five in the morning, thus extinguishing his life, then, remarkably, he has accurately predicted the hour of his own death. Fourth, whether Miss Havisham's phantom-like appearance to Arthur is authentic or not, it is clear that his belief in it is so strong that he engages in a visible struggle as he dies. Miss Havisham's power over Arthur in this scene transcends the laws of nature--it is a manifestation of her surreality.

In Great Expectations, Dickens uses surrealism to contrast the deception of appearances with the extraordinary powers of the spirit and of the subconscious mind. Magwitch proves to be a noble character despite his tendency to look at all times "like the slouching fugitive on the marshes" (331) Pip first meets. However, appearances do not daunt Magwitch; he is not afraid of reality masked beneath layers of pretence, as he explains to Pip: "'I'm not afeerd to perch upon a scarecrow. If there's death hid inside of it, there is, and let him come out, and I'll face him, and then I'll believe in him and not afore'" (327). Mr. Jaggers phrases the same sentiment in more general terms: "'Take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence. There's no better rule'" (329). Pip receives this advice only after he has discovered the extent of the self-deception he has fostered for

years. Dickens demonstrates that in opposition to appearances, subconscious manifestations of reality such as dreamlike perceptions and premonitions are often reliable sources of knowledge. For example, Pip's surrealistic premonition of Miss Havisham's accident, expressed as an illusion of the imagination, is, paradoxically, more concrete than the bits and pieces of information he misconstrues as evidence of Miss Havisham's benevolent intentions towards him. The tension between real and surreal in Great Expectations is expressed in Pip's description of the delusions he experiences while suffering a fever shortly after the death of Magwitch:

> Whether I really had been down in Garden Court in the dead of the night, groping about for the boat that I supposed to be there; whether I had two or three times come to myself on the staircase with great terror, not knowing how I had got out of bed; whether I had found myself lighting the lamp, possessed by the idea that he was coming up the stairs, and that the lights were blown out; whether I had been inexpressibly harassed by the distracted talking, laughing, and groaning of some one, and had half suspected those sounds to be of my own making; whether there had been a closed iron furnace in a dark corner of the room, and a voice had called out over and over again that Miss Havisham was consuming within it; these were things that I tried to settle with myself and get into some order . . . .
>
> That I had a fever and was avoided, that I suffered greatly, that I often lost my reason, that the time seemed interminable, that I confounded impossible existences with my own identity; that I was a brick in the house wall, and yet entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me; that I was a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf, and yet that I implored in my own person to have the engine stopped, and my part in it hammered off; that I passed through these phases of disease, I know of my own remembrance, and did in some sort know at the time. (457-58)

At the height of his delirium, Pip is tortured by images that may be read as "dream logic."[25] While he reviews the trauma and anxiety of trying to help Magwitch, of whom he has become very fond, to escape, he simultaneously dwells on the fate of Miss Havisham, with which he is

inextricably involved. Even more disturbing is his overwhelming sense of helpless passivity, which, in retrospect, has been the governing condition under which he has sought his great expectations. Julian Moynahan offers a plausible reading of Pip's visions of himself as a brick in the wall and as a steel beam of a vast engine as follows:

> The hero-victim cries for release from his unsought position of height and power, but cannot help himself from functioning as a moving part of a monstrous apparatus which seems to sustain itself from a plunge into the abyss only through the continuous expenditure of destructive force. . . . this vast engine can be taken to represent at one and the same time the demonic side of the hero's career and a society that maintains its power intact by the continuous destruction of the hopes and lives of its weaker members. . . . Pip's career enacts his society's condition of being--its guilt, its sinfulness, and in the end, its helplessness to cleanse itself of a taint 'of prison and crime.'[26]

In this scene, Dickens achieves great artistic balance between realism and surrealism. Pip's hallucinations are real in a psychological sense because they are surreal reconstructions of real events--they present, in an economical form, clear images of the trials that he has endured on his journey to self-discovery.

CHAPTER III

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

In Our Mutual Friend, Dickens probes further the boundaries of fictional realism. Many characters in this novel assume false identities; reality which is based on appearances is satirised; humans behave like inanimate objects or exhibit animalistic traits; the physical world, as well as many characters, is presented as being in a state of fragmentation and degeneration; and the power of the imagination is shown to be an indomitable force. The use of surrealism in this novel--the last that Dickens completed--is more comprehensive than in either Bleak House or Great Expectations. In Our Mutual Friend, Dickens "dramatizes" a world which is "splintered and incoherent";[1] and he tries to convince the reader "that the real is unreal and that the unreal is 'real.'"[2] In his attempt to achieve the latter goal, Dickens strives, as the surrealists do, "to reduce and finally to dispose altogether of the flagrant contradictions that exist between dream and waking life, the 'unreal' and the 'real,' the unconscious and the conscious. . . ."[3] The main agency of this trial is Dickens's masterful manipulation of the theme of resurrection which even surpasses his treatment of the same theme in A Tale of Two Cities.

In the chaotic and unreal world of Our Mutual Friend, the most fundamental reality, the identity of the self, is undermined. Jenny Wren's fiction that her father is really her child is so ingrained in her consciousness that she makes a spontaneous public affirmation of it

when she meets her father, near death, being carried along the street.[4] Jenny adopts the persona of mother figure as a means of coping with a grim reality--that, although she is only a child, she is completely responsible for the welfare of both herself and her father. Fascination Fledgeby, proprietor of Pubsey and Co., uses Riah as his mask (688) by forcing Riah to keep his identity as proprietor of that establishment a secret (335). Indeed, Fledgeby enjoys the sport of falsely characterising Riah, his honest servant, as a cruel, heartless and predatory moneylender (486, 636). Noddy Boffin assumes the guise of a miser in order to educate Bella Wilfer about the corrupting influences of money and to punish the avaricious Silas Wegg (846). His assumed identity proves to be a successful means of achieving these ends. The disguises adopted by Jenny Wren, Fledgeby and Boffin serve as masks to hide true character--they are a superficial means of altering reality. The false identity which John Harmon assumes, however, is not exclusively superficial. His disguise is unique in that it alters reality from his own perspective rather than simply manipulating others' perceptions of his character. On the night he returns to the scene of his "death," he says:

> 'It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals,' said he, 'to be looking into a churchyard on a wild windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to know that I lie buried somewhere else, as they lie buried here. Nothing uses me to it. A spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognized among mankind, than I feel.
> 'But this is the fanciful side of the situation. It has a real side . . . .' (422)

The "fanciful side of the situation"--that, because he is assumed dead, John Harmon is in a sense really dead--is a surrealistic distortion of reality. Harmon's alienation from his true identity causes him to feel

dissociated from himself as if he were now a disembodied being or a mere shadow of existence. In the world of Our Mutual Friend, distortions of this kind redefine and challenge the boundaries of fictional realism by seeking equilibrium between what is real in a tangible sense and what is real in an imaginative sense. Harmon's spiritual unease, which he calls fancy, represents the transparency of a society plagued by loss of true identity--it is an individual, surreal expression of a societal malaise.

The disguise motif in Our Mutual Friend is also significant in that it illustrates the importance to the characters in this society of conceptions of reality which are based on superficial appearances. Lady Tippins, for example, is a character without substance; the essence of her being is dye and varnish:

> Whereabout in the bonnet and drapery announced by her name, any fragment of the real woman may be concealed, is perhaps known to her maid; but you could easily buy all you see of her, in Bond street; or you might scalp her, and peel her, and scrape her, and make two Lady Tippinses out of her, and yet not penetrate to the genuine article. (164)

While Tippins is a figure of fun, the Lammles, who also lack substance, are figures of scorn. Faith in appearances causes them to get married--a decision they rue when they discover their mutual false pretences (169). Some of the most biting satire of the false reality of appearances in Our Mutual Friend, however, is reserved for Mr Podsnap, who subscribes to a system of beliefs Dickens refers to as "Podsnappery" (175). Podsnap, a proud and condescending man with a narrow experience of life, presumes moral and intellectual superiority over everyone he meets. His presumptuous manner is well illustrated when he asks a foreign gentleman whether he has observed any "tokens" of the British Constitution in the streets of London. This question elicits a response

which makes Podsnap appear ridiculous:

> The foreign gentleman, with patient courtesy, entreated pardon; 'But what was tokenz?'
> 'Marks,' said Mr Podsnap; 'Signs, you know, Appearances--Traces.'
> 'Ah! Of a Orse?' inquired the foreign gentleman. (179)

The foreigner is not handicapped by the English language, but rather by Podsnap's line of thought. Podsnap's reality is a compound of superficialities: tokens, marks, signs, appearances, traces; the foreigner, on the other hand, does not trifle with reality: he sees clearly and interprets concisely, to an ironic and humorous effect.

The tendency to take superficial appearances as guides to reality in this society is best illustrated in the second chapter of the novel in which Mr. and Mrs. Veneering host a banquet for their newly acquired friends. The company present at this banquet are introduced to the reader as reflections in the "great looking-glass above the sideboard," as if their mirror images easily substitute for themselves. In fact, the mirror reflects a surreal melange of both people and objects--all equally animated, as if the mirror itself is a source of life:

> Reflects the new Veneering crest, in gold and eke in silver, frosted and also thawed, a camel of all work. The Heralds' College found out a Crusading ancestor for Veneering who bore a camel on his shield (or might have done it if he had thought of it), and a caravan of camels take charge of the fruits and flowers and candles, and kneel down to be loaded with the salt. Reflects Veneering; forty, wavy-haired, dark, tending to corpulence, sly, mysterious, filmy--a kind of sufficiently well-looking veiled-prophet, not prophesying. Reflects Mrs Veneering; fair, aquiline-nosed and fingered, not so much light hair as she might have, gorgeous in raiment and jewels, enthusiastic, propitiatory, conscious that a corner of her husband's veil is over herself. Reflects Podsnap; prosperously feeding, two little light-coloured wiry wings, one on either side of his else bald head, looking as like his hairbrushes as his hair, dissolving view of red beads on his forehead, large allowance of crumpled shirt-collar up behind. Reflects Mrs Podsnap; fine woman for Professor Owen, quantity of bone, neck and nostrils like a rocking-horse, hard features, majestic head-dress in which Podsnap has hung golden

> offerings. Reflects Twemlow; grey, dry, polite, susceptible to east wind, First-Gentleman-in-Europe collar and cravat, cheeks drawn in as if he had made a great effort to retire into himself some years ago, and had got so far and had never got any farther. Reflects mature young lady; raven locks, and complexion that lights up well when well powdered--as it is--carrying on considerably in the captivation of mature young gentleman; with too much nose in his face, too much ginger in his whiskers, too much torso in his waistcoat, too much sparkle in his studs, his eyes, his buttons, his talk, and his teeth. Reflects charming old Lady Tippins on Veneering's right; with an immense obtuse drab oblong face, like a face in a tablespoon, and a dyed Long Walk up the top of her head, as a convenient public approach to the bunch of false hair behind, pleased to patronize Mrs Veneering opposite, who is pleased to be patronized. (52-53)

Dickens's use of the mirror in this description is a clever means of highlighting the hollow vanity of superficial reality. In the mirror, the dominant traits of Veneering and company are exaggerated, thus emphasising the absurdity of the veneer each of them cultivates. Yet, in typical Dickensian fashion, the mirror also reveals depths of character. It discerns, for example, that Twemlow is polite and retiring while Veneering is sly and mysterious, and it betrays a sense of something amiss in the overly abundant sparkle of mature young gentleman's (Alfred Lammle's) studs, eyes, buttons, talk and teeth. Paradoxically, the mirror reflects and illuminates reality beyond the realm of superficial appearances; it is a surrealistic device--penetrating, as it does, reality masked by polish, veneer and shadows.

Indeed, as Juliet McMaster observes, many things in Our Mutual Friend are seen "only as reflected in mirrors or other polished surfaces, and there is some emphasis on the reflected image as having its own existence distinct from what it reflects." She cites the following exchange between the Lammles as proof that they "can carry on a separate and even a more honest relation in the mirror than in fact."[5]

> There was a mirror on the wall before them, and her eyes just caught him smirking in it. She gave the reflected image a look of the deepest disdain, and the image received it in the glass. Next moment they quietly eyed each other, as if they, the principals, had had no part in that expressive transaction. (312)

J. H. Matthews states that "[t]he mirrored reflection is, for real people, but the confirmation of their presence." The use of mirror images as the sole proof of a character's existence, he suggests, contravenes the conventions of realism: "the result is surrealism."[6]

Dickens's best use of surrealism in Our Mutual Friend is realised through the fragmentation and degeneration of the society he presents in this novel. Venus, who calls himself a "preserver of Animals and Birds" and an "Articulator of human bones" (128), officially recognises this degenerative tendency. His occupation as a taxidermist necessitates the possession of an odd collection of parts and pieces of various species, animal and human. He lists some of the bizarre contents of his shop for Mr. Wegg:

> My working bench. My young man's bench. A Wice. Tools. Bones, warious. Skulls, warious. Preserved Indian Baby. African ditto. Bottled preparations, warious. Everything within reach of your hand, in good preservation. The mouldy ones a-top. What's in those hampers over them again, I don't quite remember. Say, human warious. Cats. Articulated English baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, warious. Mummied bird. Dried cuticle, warious. (126)

Venus's matter-of-fact approach to his work is disquieting--one does not often encounter an "Articulator of human bones." Yet Mr. Venus is the character on whom the key to understanding much of the plot of Our Mutual Friend rests. His shop is a small scale of the novel as a whole where, as U. C. Knoepflmacher points out, "Dickens manages to suggest the mutilation of all identities and relations . . . [through] surrealistic fragmentation of the very anatomy of his characters." In

Laughter and Despair: Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era, Knoepflmacher makes a correlation between Venus's profession and the movement in the novel towards restoring and rebuilding relationships, or, as Knoepflmacher phrases it, "'articulating' . . . [a] new body formed by . . . [a] band of mutual friends."[7] That there is indeed a literal and figurative connection between Venus's work and the events in the novel is supported by several examples of "surrealistic fragmentation" of characters' anatomies. Mr. Wegg, who is a dangerous and misguided man, is without one of his legs. In reference to the fact that Mr. Venus retains that leg as part of the miscellany in his shop, Wegg asks, "Where am I?" (126). This question is ironic in light of the development of the plot: Venus ultimately determines Wegg's destiny by betraying him to Mr. Boffin, thus placing him outside the band of mutual friends. Jenny Wren's father, Mr. Dolls, in a scene in which he is severely scolded, is a "shaking figure, unnerved and disjointed from head to foot" (291). He is, as his name suggests, "a kind of monstrous and uncontrollable doll . . . , made up of detachable parts, and less than human."[8] Like Mr. Dolls, whose physical disjointedness is a symptom of his abject situation in life, many characters in the novel manifest themselves through physical anomalies. Knoepflmacher suggests that in order "to stress each character's incompleteness, . . . [Dickens] repeatedly designates human beings by a single member of their mechanical selves." He identifies "a Daliesque landscape of separate hands, arms, eyes, noses, legs" in the novel as follows:

> Even in death, Gaffer Hexam's rigid "clenched right hand" holds the silver that killed him (ch. 14). The caretaker at the church where the marriage service for the Lammles is held, sticks out "a left hand" which appears to be "in a state of rheumatism, but is in fact voluntarily doubled up as a money-box" (ch. 10). Moving from hands to arms, we find Mr Podsnap,

> who has "acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems" (ch. 11). Miss Peecher's star pupil, whose piecemeal sentences are the product of Headstone's utilitarian education, has developed the classroom habit of mechanically stretching out an arm, "as if to hail a cab or omnibus"; she must hook her right arm behind her before she can even speak. Miss Peecher herself, who waters her flowers amidst the dust, is woefully incomplete. Thinking about her unreciprocated love for Headstone (whose own passion for Lizzie does not fit into the rigid, unemotional pattern he has created for himself), Miss Peecher looks at a "brown-paper pattern" of a dress she is making. With a sigh, she transfixes "that part of her dress where her heart would have been if she had had the dress on with a sharp, sharp needle" (ch. 18).
>
> What is wanting in all these fragmented bits of humanity is a heart such as that possessed by the elect few who will later form the nucleus for a new body. Lady Tippins, who stares at the world through a large golden eyeglass that props up one of her drooping eyelids, is so padded and stuffed that "you might scalp her, and scrape her, yet not penetrate the genuine article." The genuine article is also missing in Rogue Riderhood, who goes through puppetlike motions on drinking wine, tilting it from left cheek to right cheek and jerking it into his stomach, as if asking each of these bodily parts, "What do you think of it?" (ch. 12). The heart is missing in Fledgeby, whose nose is almost twisted off by Lammle; it is missing in Lammle himself whose own nose displays "ominous finger marks." It is missing, most of all, in Silas Wegg, the false servant who hoped to put his master's nose to the grindstone.
>
> Dickens describes Silas Wegg by claiming that "he was so wooden a man that he seemed to have taken his wooden leg naturally, and rather suggested to the fanciful observer that he might be expected--if his development received no untimely check--to be completely set up with a pair of wooden legs in about six months" (ch. 5).[9]

Dickens's depiction of severely flawed characters such as Podsnap and Wegg as mechanical and fragmented is a means of making them appear dehumanised. Two other traits exhibited by characters in Our Mutual Friend complete the picture of societal degeneration in this novel, to wit, inertness and animalism.

R. D. McMaster observes that "[t]he people and objects of Dickens' world seem caught by surprise in the midst of a universal metamorphosis. Objects behave like people; people verge on the inanimate; or they

resemble animals, birds, fish, and other inhuman forms of life."[10] People are often inanimate objects or animals in Our Mutual Friend. Mr. Twemlow is treated as "an innocent piece of dinner-furniture" (48); guests at one of the Veneering dinner parties include "a Poem on Shakespeare, a Grievance, and a Public Office" (49); Miss Podsnap is a "young rocking-horse" (175); and Miss Peecher is "[a] little pincushion, a little housewife, a little book, a little work-box, a little set of tables and weights and measures, and a little woman, all in one" (268). Each of these characters functions as an ornament--they highlight a tendency towards dehumanisation. Silas Wegg, whose wooden leg seems a natural part of his anatomy, perhaps best illustrates this tendency: he "epitomizes the inertness of a dehumanized world."[11] Wegg is introduced as "a knotty man, and a close-grained, with a face carved out of very hard material, that had just as much play of expression as a watchman's rattle. When he laughed, certain jerks occurred in it, and the rattle sprung" (89). Noting Wegg's case as an example of one of Dickens's characters who is "grotesquely in transition from animate to inanimate," Donald Fanger cites an instance of "the counterpart of the process at work on Wegg [as] shown a few pages later at work on a tavern":

> The wood forming the chimney-pieces, beams, partitions, floors and doors, of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, seemed in its old age fraught with confused memories of its youth. In many places it had become gnarled and riven, according to the manner of old trees; knots started out of it, and here and there it seemed to twist itself into some likeness of boughs. In this state of second childhood, it had an air of being in its own way garrulous about its early life. (105)

Fanger notes that in the excess of grotesquely comic humour in these two examples, Dickens "point[s] toward surrealism."[12]

However, an even more grotesque debasement of human nature in this novel is accomplished through the development of animal traits in several characters. Gaffer Hexam, who sports a "ruffled crest" (65), looks and acts like a "bird of prey" (45); Lady Tippins has the face and neck of a "species of lobster" (466); and Mr. Lammle manifests this trait of the "Mephistopheles family"--when dejected, he trails a stick behind himself as he walks, as a substitute for "a drooping tail" (168). Bradley Headstone's character is imbued with much "of what was animal" (267). He leads a double life: constrained schoolmaster and madly jealous rival of Eugene Wrayburn. The habitual restraint under which he toils explodes each evening as he follows Eugene Wrayburn through the streets of London, giving rein, as he does, to his animal impulses:

> The state of the man was murderous, and he knew it. More, he irritated it, with a kind of perverse pleasure akin to that which a sick man sometimes has in irritating a wound upon his body. Tied up all day with his disciplined show upon him, subdued to the performance of his routine of educational tricks, encircled by a gabbling crowd, he broke loose at night like an ill-tamed wild animal. Under his daily restraint, it was his compensation, not his trouble, to give a glance towards his state at night, and to the freedom of its being indulged. If great criminals told the truth--which, being great criminals, they do not--they would rarely tell of their struggles against the crime. Their struggles are towards it. They buffet with opposing waves, to gain the bloody shore, not to recede from it. This man perfectly comprehended that he hated his rival with his strongest and worst forces, and that if he tracked him to Lizzie Hexam, his so doing would never serve himself with her, or serve her. All his pains were taken, to the end that he might incense himself with the sight of the detested figure in her company and favour, in her place of concealment. And he knew as well what act of his would follow if he did, as he knew that his mother had borne him. Granted, that he may not have held it necessary to make express mention to himself of the one familiar truth any more than of the other.
>
> He knew equally well that he fed his wrath and hatred, and that he accumulated provocation and self-justification, by being made the nightly sport of the reckless and insolent

> Eugene. Knowing all this, and still always going on with infinite endurance, pains and perseverance, could his dark soul doubt whither he went? (609)

In this excerpt, Dickens presents the psychological profile of a criminal mind. Headstone, whose deranged tendencies metamorphose him into a wild beast, is a kind of split character--publicly tame and subdued, and privately barbaric and animalistic. In "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," Edmund Wilson states that Headstone leads a "double life" which is made especially "dreadful and convincing [when he] . . . goes about his duties as a schoolmaster after he has decided to murder Eugene."[13] Indeed, the very language Dickens uses to describe Headstone's life as a teacher reinforces the dominance of Headstone's animalistic tendencies. "[D]isciplined show," "educational tricks" and "gabbling crowd" are phrases that, collectively, suggest an element of circus performance in his work. Headstone cannot resolve the inevitable conflict between his public and private selves. He is the ultimate representative of human degradation and fragmentation in this novel: a consummate half-man, half-beast. A ghostly, surreal image of his fragmentation is provided when he shows himself as a "white-lipped, wild-eyed, draggled-haired" spectacle to Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood. Tortured by the conviction that he cannot conceal his hate, anger and jealousy from them, and that they exult in his pain, Headstone appears "like a haggard head suspended in the air: so completely did the force of his expression cancel his figure" (608).

Human fragmentation and degeneration in Our Mutual Friend is mirrored in the fragmentation and degeneration of the physical environment. Dickens describes the incongruity and fractured disorder of one neighbourhood as being

> like a toy neighbourhood taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public-house facing nowhere; here, another unfinished street already in ruins; there, a church; here, an immense new warehouse; there, a dilapidated old country villa; then, a medley of black ditch, sparkling cucumber-frame, rank field, richly cultivated kitchen-garden, brick viaduct, arch-spanned canal, and disorder of frowziness and fog. As if the child had given the table a kick, and gone to sleep. (268)

Dickens's suggestion that the nonsensical, chaotic array of streets, buildings, ditch, field and garden in this description may be visualised by imagining the caprices of a child at play is an ingenious method of imposing a disjointed and bizarre sense of order on the scene. Dorothy Van Ghent discusses this method of organisation in The English Novel: Form and Function:

> Dickens saw his world patently all in pieces, and as a child's vision would offer some reasonable explanation of why such a world was that way--and, by the act of explanation, would make that world yield up a principle of order, however obscure or fantastic--so, with a child's literalism of imagination, he discovered organization among his fragments.[14]

Juliet McMaster asserts that "the random or forced juxtaposition of incongruous parts [is] the structure of the characters' own vision" in Our Mutual Friend. She cites the scene in which Mr. Dolls is carried to a doctor's shop as "the most fully visualized fragmentation of vision" that occurs in the novel:

> Thither he was brought; the window becoming from within, a wall of faces, deformed into all kinds of shapes through the agency of globular red bottles, green bottles, blue bottles, and other coloured bottles. A ghastly light shining upon him that he didn't need, the beast so furious but a few minutes gone, was quiet enough now, with a strange mysterious writing on his face, reflected from one of the great bottles, as if Death had marked him: 'Mine.' (800)

McMaster perceives that at Mr. Dolls's death,

> we are allowed both to see him, and to see through his eyes a world that is visually split apart and reassembled wrong. . . . Such a surrealistic vision of a reality that is

> separated, distorted, and luridly coloured according to a pattern that bears only a chance relation to the actual forms is in its way representative. Mr. Dolls dies in a world from which meaning and coherence have withdrawn.[15]

Fragmentation is a technique which is so central to Our Mutual Friend that Dickens even employs it as a stylistic device in the narration of the novel. The most immediate example of this is the yoking together of the first two chapters of the novel, which appear, upon initial examination, to be totally disconnected. In the first chapter, Gaffer Hexam, a river-dredger, fishes a corpse out of the river Thames; and in the second chapter, the Veneerings host a fashionable dinner party. Paradoxically, it is because these two separate fragments of London life are so fundamentally alike that Dickens connects them. His vision is not random, it only appears to be so, for as Peter Lewis notes, "[t]he 'respectable' world of the nouveaux riches Veneerings, the haut bourgeois Podsnap, the fortune-hunting Lammles, and the unscrupulous profiteer Fledgeby is no less predatory than Limehouse Hole."[16] A more literal example of Dickens's use of textual fragmentation is his incorporation of whole sections of F. Somner Merryweather's Lives and Anecdotes of Misers directly into his own text.[17] By interrupting his own narrative in this way, Dickens achieves an absurdly comic effect. Dickens's use of fragmentation throughout Our Mutual Friend--in the disjointed anatomies of his characters, in the disordered and disconnected physical landscape, in the abundance of particles of dust, in the very style of certain parts of the text itself--prefigures T. S. Eliot's vision of a "heap of broken images"[18] in "The Waste Land."

In Our Mutual Friend, dust is the common denominator in the fragmentation of both humanity and of the physical environment. Edgar Johnson calls this novel "The Waste Land of Dickens's work"[19]--an observation which passages depicting a death-in-life world such as the following strongly support:

> The wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled. The shrubs wrung their many hands, bemoaning that they had been over-persuaded by the sun to bud; the young leaves pined; the sparrows repented of their early marriages, like men and women; the colours of the rainbow were discernible, not in floral spring, but in the faces of the people whom it nibbled and pinched. And ever the wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled. (191)

In Our Mutual Friend, dust is a primary source of physical infection and lifelessness--it is an element which distorts nature and causes it to manifest itself surrealistically. The distortion of the natural world in Our Mutual Friend is further illustrated in nightmarish depictions such as the following:

> R. Wilfer locked up his desk one evening, and, putting his bunch of keys in his pocket much as if it were his peg-top, made for home. His home was in the Holloway region north of London, and then divided from it by fields and trees. Between Battle Bridge and that part of the Holloway district in which he dwelt, was a tract of suburban Sahara, where tiles and bricks were burnt, bones were boiled, carpets were beat, rubbish was shot, dogs were fought, and dust was heaped by contractors. Skirting the border of this desert, by the way he took, when the light of its kiln-fires made lurid smears on the fog, R. Wilfer sighed and shook his head.
>
> 'Ah me!' said he, 'what might have been is not what is!'
>
> With which commentary on human life, indicating an experience of it not exclusively his own, he made the best of his way to the end of his journey. (76)

> A grey dusty withered evening in London city has not a hopeful aspect. The closed warehouses and offices have an air of death about them, and the national dread of colour has an air of mourning. The towers and steeples of the many house-encompassed churches, dark and dingy as the sky that seems descending on them, are no relief to the general gloom; a sun-dial on a church-wall has the look, in its useless black shade, of having failed in its business enterprise and stopped payment for ever; melancholy waifs and strays of housekeepers and porter sweep melancholy waifs and strays of papers and

> pins into the kennels, and other more melancholy waifs and strays explore them, searching and stooping and poking for anything to sell. The set of humanity outward from the City is as a set of prisoners departing from gaol, and dismal Newgate seems quite as fit a stronghold for the mighty Lord Mayor as his own state-dwelling. (450)

Each of these scenes creates a keen sense of despair by focusing on such wasteland imagery as a dusty, suburban desert, and dark, dusty, barren streets. Johnson correctly perceives that "[a]s in the world of Eliot's poem, this London is a waste land of stony rubbish and broken images, of dead trees, dry rock, and dust."[20] In fact, Our Mutual Friend is a major intertext for Eliot's "The Waste Land." Originally, Eliot was even to have used a quotation from Our Mutual Friend in the title of his poem--a gesture which would have been quite fitting since, as Andrew Sanders remarks, "both works share a common setting and a dislocated horror at the prospect of urban dissolution."[21]

Our Mutual Friend is like "The Waste Land" in another respect as well: both place massive emphasis on the themes of death and resurrection. In essence, Our Mutual Friend illustrates the observation in Bleak House that dust is "the universal article into which . . . all things on earth, animate and inanimate, are resolving" (359). The following phrase from the Christian Order for the Burial of the Dead in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer is the obvious context which frames Dickens's sombre yet redemptive vision in the novel:

> Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to receive unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed: we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection . . . .[22]

Johnson briefly summarises Dickens's concentration on the themes of death and resurrection in Our Mutual Friend as follows:

> The mythological image of drowning or near-drowning, symbol at once of death and resurrection, appears and reappears in a dozen variants. The third mate who changes clothing and identities with John Harmon in the waterside tavern actually drowns, as do Bradley Headstone and Rogue Riderhood caught in a death-grip of hate with each other. Earlier in the story Riderhood is nearly drowned, but is brought back to consciousness, only to use his restoration to life for treachery and blackmail. The near-drownings of John Harmon and Eugene Wrayburn are each a prelude to rebirth into a new identity; Eugene's is almost a sort of baptismal immersion that represents the death of his old selfish levity and his spiritual rebirth. The final disposition of the immutable mean-spirited Wegg is the inverse of Eugene's salvation: Sloppy dumps him with a prodigious splash into a scavenger's cart of muck.[23]

Indeed, death is everywhere in Our Mutual Friend. There is even an image of death in Bradley Headstone's name, and death is the trade in which Gaffer Hexam and Rogue Riderhood, in their occupation as river-dredgers, deal. To Jenny Wren, life itself is death, and death is life. From her perspective on the house-top of Pubsey and Co., far removed from the streets below, Jenny pities "the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets," and she feels, in a mystical sense, that she is dead and at peace (334). Jenny's occasional escape with Lizzie to this vantage point is a kind of resurrection, but only in a minor sense. Throughout the course of the novel, Dickens achieves a much more complex rendering of the theme, particularly as it applies to the story of John Harmon.

In dealing with the themes of death and resurrection in Our Mutual Friend, Dickens picks up and develops further his work in A Tale of Two Cities which is also saturated with the same themes. Analogies may be drawn between three sets of characters in particular: Dr. Manette and Eugene Wrayburn; Jerry Cruncher and Silas Wegg; and Sidney Carton and John Harmon. The first set of characters is alike in that they are both

"recalled to life": Dr. Manette begins a new life after he is released from prison, where he has been "buried alive" for many years; Eugene Wrayburn, who is "virtually dead" after being viciously attacked by Bradley Headstone, is "recalled to life" by Lizzie Hexam, who, as she rescues him from the river, prays that he may be "raised from death" (769). Both Jerry Cruncher and Silas Wegg are connected with the theme of resurrection in a comic way. Jerry Cruncher calls himself a "resurrection man" because he engages in the work of robbing graves; and Silas Wegg "bargains for his leg in a grotesque parody of the Resurrection of the Body"[24] when he demands of Mr. Venus, in reference to his deceased member, "'Now, look here, what did you give for me?'" and "'What will you take for me?'" (126). Sidney Carton is resurrected in the body of his friend and physical double, Charles Darnay, when Darnay is returned to life just before he is to be executed, by Carton, who takes his place. By sacrificing his life so that his friend may live, Sidney Carton morally redeems his previously purposeless existence. John Harmon more fully embodies the theme of resurrection than Carton does, however, because he both dies and is resurrected in the same body. Presumed dead when the novel begins, Harmon assumes a new identity so that he may reject both the inheritance of dust his father bequeathed him, and its attendant condition, that he marry Bella Wilfer. When he falls in love with Bella and she returns his love, Harmon is free to reveal his true identity, thus resurrecting himself and defeating, at the same time, the curse of the family dust. In Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist, Joseph Gold states that in Our Mutual Friend Dickens conveys

> the sense of a death and a rebirth, not in the name-sake of future generations, not in the memory of the loving survivors, but in the live, reborn man himself, in the act of living, in the realization of human communion. Dickens must kill John Harmon and resurrect him in the here and now at the same time.[25]

The death of John Harmon's old self and his resurrection to a new life provides an essential redemption in the midst of the wasteland of the novel with its abundant fragmentation and "heap of broken images." Throughout the course of Our Mutual Friend, rejuvenation of those who dwell in the wasteland is also shown to be possible through the transcendent powers of the imagination. Three characters in particular, Lizzie Hexam, Jenny Wren and Betty Higden, achieve triumph over the mean conditions under which they live through their own surreal visions of a better reality. Lizzie imagines she sees "pictures" in the fire at home (71-73), pictures which, to her, constitute "the real world" (278). In her article entitled "From Nightmare to Reverie: Continuity in Our Mutual Friend," Mary Ann Kelly observes that "in the reverie inspired by the light of the coals, . . . Lizzie is able to remember and to construct from bits and pieces of the past, fantasies which attest to the possibility of a better world than the one in which she actually lives." Lizzie relies on her dreamy visions as a means of coping with the harshness of her life; indeed, as Kelly perceives, her dream life is deeply connected to her sense of identity, and to her ability to shape a better future for herself.[26] While she believes that her low station in life prevents her from ever becoming Eugene Wrayburn's wife, she sees a vision of herself as a lady who wins Eugene's favour--a lady of whom to Jenny she speaks thus:

> 'Her heart--is given him, with all its love and truth. She would joyfully die with him, or, better than that, die for him. She knows he has failings, but she thinks they have

> grown up through his being like one cast away, for the want of something to trust in, and care for, and think well of. And she says, that lady rich and beautiful that I can never come near, "Only put me in that empty place, only try how little I mind myself, only prove what a world of things I will do and bear for you, and I hope that you might even come to be much better than you are, through me who am so much worse, and hardly worth the thinking of beside you."' (404-05)

This dream is a blueprint for a reality that transpires exactly as Lizzie imagines it.

Jenny's surreal visions are of a different order than Lizzie's because they involve her sensory perceptions as well as her imagination. In the following scene, she describes her special communion with the dead children who helped to ease her pain when she was a young child:

> '. . . when I was a little child,' in a tone as though it were ages ago, 'the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw. They were not like me; they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; they were never in pain. They were not like the children of the neighbours; they never made me tremble all over, by setting up shrill noises, and they never mocked me. Such numbers of them too! All in white dresses, and with something shining on the borders, and on their heads, that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long bright slanting rows, and say all together, "Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!" When I told them who it was, they answered, "Come and play with us!" When I said, "I never play! I can't play!" they swept about me and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down, and said, all together, "have patience, and we will come again." Whenever they came back, I used to know they were coming before I saw the long bright rows, by hearing them ask, all together a long way off, "Who is this in pain! who is this in pain!" And I used to cry out, "O my blessed children, it's poor me. Have pity on me. Take me up and make me light!"' (290)

Jenny is also endowed with a gift for smelling flowers and for hearing birds sing, where neither exist (289-90). Eugene recognises the healing value of her "fanciful powers" when he is near death, for, remembering her immense capacity for dealing with pain, he sends for her to come to

his bedside. When she arrives, he says to Mortimer, "'Ask her if she has seen the children'" and "'Ask her if she has smelt the flowers'" (806), thus signalling a great transformation in his character[27] and expressing a wish to enter the rich world of fantasy. George Levine states that Eugene's transformation intimates "something beyond the narrative explanatory powers of realism . . . . [It] has the quality of dream and is accompanied . . . by a passivity not much different from death."[28]

Betty Higden, too, has dreamy and "peculiar visionary powers."[29] She exercises her surreal vision during the last hours of her life as she seeks solace from her dead children and grandchildren, whom she senses are very near her:

> A barge was being towed towards her, and she sat down on the bank to rest and watch it. . . . she thought she saw the forms of her dead children and dead grandchildren peopling the barge, and waving their hands to her in solemn measure . . . . (570-71)

> By what visionary hands she was led along upon that journey . . . by what voices, hushed in the grave, she seemed to be addressed; how she fancied the dead child in her arms again, and times innumerable adjusted her shawl to keep it warm . . . . (574)

Betty, like Lizzie and Jenny, is ultimately free from the fragmenting and degenerating influences of the wasteland which surrounds her because she possesses two great gifts: a strong and indefatigable imagination, and vision which sees "beyond the physical world of matter."[30]

In Our Mutual Friend, Dickens demonstrates that total reliance on superficial appearances is an unstable and incomplete foundation for knowledge of one's world. Indeed, the novel ends on this ironic note: the Veneerings, "[h]aving found out the clue to that great mystery how people can contrive to live beyond their means" (an earlier point of

debate in reference to the Lammles), shall, according to "the Books of the Insolvent Fates . . . make a resounding smash next week" (886). Speaking of the false loyalty their friends show them in the meantime, Dickens says:

> It shall likewise come to pass, at as nearly as possible the same period, that Society will discover that it always did despise Veneering, and distrust Veneering, and that when it went to Veneerings' to dinner it always had misgivings--though very secretly at the time, it would seem, and in a perfectly private and confidential manner. (887)

Unlike the Veneerings and their friends, who are so shallow and deceitful that they are unable to recognise the obvious, Lizzie Hexam is a perceptive character who weighs belief in what appears to be real with faith in what is not real. Waiting at home alone for her father on the night that he dies, she spontaneously calls, out of doors, "'Father, was that you calling me? . . . Father! . . . Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before!'" (211). In a haunting passage later in the novel, the winds carry Lizzie's alarmed cries to her father's dead body (221-22). Lizzie's knowledge that her father is dead is surreal--and because depicted in this way, extremely convincing.

In Our Mutual Friend, characters who possess imagination spiritually transcend the bleak wasteland in which they live. Lizzie Hexam's faith in her visions is so strong that she avoids being infected by the wasteland of the soul that abounds in this society. Her inner mirror, though surreal, is a true and reliable guide to life; she cannot be swayed by false appearances, satirised collectively in the great mirror in the Veneerings' dining room. U. C. Knoepflmacher makes these comments on the tension that exists between real and unreal throughout the novel:

> In the course of Our Mutual Friend Dickens does his best to persuade the reader that the real is unreal and that the unreal is "real." Dickens had attempted to work out this paradox before, but never quite as consciously or as forcefully. He assaults the material world we ordinarily believe in and makes it seem so incongruous and implausible that we become convinced of its unreality. By dissolving before our eyes both the social organization and the physical world to which his characters belong, the novelist, like a magician, wants to condition us to accept the illusory fairy tale he offers as a substitute for our belief in the reality principle. And he succeeds. As we eventually shall see, we give our assent to fantasy only because Dickens the illusionist is so thoroughly capable of destroying our hold on ordinary reality.[31]

In many of his novels, Charles Dickens strives to make the reader believe that there is something magical about the world in which we live: in Our Mutual Friend, he most definitely succeeds.

CONCLUSION

> The roots of surrealism run deep and spread wide--so deep and so wide that the twentieth century advocates of surrealism have been accused more than once of possessing little talent beyond a gift for directing attention to earlier artists in whose work they have detected qualities without equal in their own. So far, indeed, as surrealism is a matter of perspective it will assuredly be seen in due time to have shown certain painters and writers in sharpened focus: Uccello, Bosch, Gustave Moreau, Sade, Lautreamont, and the Gothic Novelists.[1]

J. H. Matthews does not include Charles Dickens in his list above, but Dickens belongs there because his fiction, which reflects the influence of gothic literature,[2] is imbued with surrealism. Through the use of fantastic and incongruous imagery and the juxtaposition of the bizarre with the natural, Dickens highlights his fictional worlds with surreal effects: he "distorts, intensifies, and transcends reality in order to be profoundly true to reality."[3] In essence, Dickens employs surrealism in his novels as a tool for defining and enlarging the boundaries of fictional realism. His imagination delineates a broad spectrum of fantastic and symbolic characters, bizarre events and dreamlike elements which render facets of psychological truth to his work. Much of what is surreal in Bleak House, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend may be symbolically represented by the Mask--a Dickensian trademark. Fictional equivalents to the Mask in these novels include dream states, altered perceptions, psychological projections, grotesque characterisations, and distortions of both human nature and of the physical environment.

G. K. Chesterton, in his defense of Dickens as a writer of non-realistic material, states that in his fiction, Dickens actually captures "a degree of realism that does not exist in reality."[4] He refers, specifically, to Dickens's ability to endow inanimate objects with life, thus adding a dreamlike, extraordinary dimension to the most ordinary situations. Many critics since Chesterton have expressed keen interest in the dreamy qualities of Dickens's fiction and have recognised that because Dickens's fictional worlds are distorted and surreal, they capture an intense degree of human experience that cannot be created through simple mimetic representations of ordinary life. In Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation, Mark Spilka quotes E. W. Tedlock, who in comparing Dickens and Kafka states that both authors achieve complex qualities of human experience, in particular, "moral and emotional ambiguity and perplexity . . . through distortion rather than realistic verisimilitude."[5] Bradley Headstone's appearance as a disembodied head in Our Mutual Friend, for example, is an excellent instance of Dickens's use of surrealistic distortion as an economical means of making a profound statement on Headstone's character that would not be nearly as effective or convincing if stated in a more straightforward manner.

Today, Chesterton's defense of Dickens is unnecessary since critics no longer use the concept of "realism" as a touchstone by which to determine the worth of a piece of fiction. Referring to Ian Watt's discussion of "formal realism," Robert Newsom argues that if realism must be so strictly qualified, then there must be no such thing as "real" realism. He adds:

> Fictional worlds, no matter how congruent with the conventional view of reality, remain as much fictional worlds as the most far-flung fantasies of disordered imagination. Kafka tells the truth as fully as Flaubert. . . . Works of art are to be studied not in relation to the worlds they purport to portray, but in relation to themselves. Judgments about value, finally, have to do with a work's truthfulness to itself and to the rules and conventions it establishes and accepts for itself.[6]

Modern readers value Dickens for the imaginative eccentricity he possessed which produced characters such as Uriah Heep, Miss Havisham and Quilp, and settings such as the Circumlocution Office, Krook's shop and Satis House. G. H. Lewes was correct in his assessment of Dickens's hallucinatory powers of perception, but in denying Dickens his rightful place among the greatest of the English novelists, he did a great disservice, not only to Dickens, but to himself as well.

In Dickens and Reality, John Romano acknowledges Dickens's "spiritual and artistic affinities with the 'higher realism' of Dostoevsky [and] the frank irreality of Kafka."[7] Dostoevsky calls himself "a realist in a higher sense" because he "depict[s] all the depths of the human soul."[8] Indeed, both Dostoevsky and Kafka are, like Dickens, remarkable in the degree to which they are able to probe the human soul in their fiction. Many critics credit these two great authors for their penetrating insight and recognise that Dickens, in many respects, inspired them both, especially in his brilliant creation of character.[9] Julian Symons states that Dickens's characters are essentially symbolic: "they exist not in the world of literal reality, but 'on the perpetually shifting frontier between ordinary life and the terror that would seem to be more real.'"[10] It is interesting that in describing Dickens's characters, Julian Symons uses a quote from Kafka's notebooks. By doing so, Symons acknowledges that Dickens's work crosses

within the boundaries of the modern. Indeed, by refusing to adhere strictly to Victorian conventions of fictional realism in the novel, Dickens anticipates the fiction written by authors such as Kafka. Dickens's fictional reality combines the conventional with the bizarre--it is reality in an imaginative, creative, dreamy and subconscious sense. Using surrealistic elements, Dickens probes the "more real than real world behind the real." Peeling through layers of superficial reality, he unmasks the reality of the imagination and of the soul.

NOTES

Introduction

[1]Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (Berkeley: U of California P, 1959) 32. Quoted by Robert Newsom, Dickens on the Romantic Side of Familiar Things: Bleak House and the Novel Tradition (New York: Columbia UP, 1977) 130.

[2]Newsom 130.

[3]George Ford, Dickens and His Readers (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1955) 145.

[4]Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," Eight Essays (New York: Doubleday, 1954) 39-40.

[5]Ford 252-53.

[6]John Gross, Dickens and the Twentieth Century, eds. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962) ix-x.

[7]G. H. Lewes, "Dickens in Relation to Criticism," The Dickens Critics, eds. George Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961) 58-61.

[8]Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit, ed. P. N. Furbank (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) 188-89.

[9]Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," The Dickens Critics, ed. George Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961) 219.

[10]Van Ghent 220-21.

[11]Newsom 48.

[12]R. H. Hutton, "The Genius of Dickens," Spectator Feb. 7, 1874. Quoted by Newsom 48-49.

[13]Newsom 49.

[14]Julien Levy, Surrealism (New York: Black Sun P, 1936) 5.

[15]Anna Balakian, Literary Origins of Surrealism (New York: King's Crown P, 1947) 7.

[16]Charles Dickens, "The Christmas Tree," Household Words, 1850. Quoted by Angus Wilson, The World of Charles Dickens (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1970) 9-10.

[17]A. Wilson 10.

[18]Harry Stone, Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979) xi.

[19]Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus (London: Dent, 1984) 165.

[20]Humphry House, "The Macabre Dickens," The Dickens Critics, eds. George Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961) 190.

[21]Elizabeth MacAndrew, The Gothic Tradition in Fiction (New York: Columbia UP, 1979) 8.

[22]Balakian 9.

[23]Ford 131.

[24]Dickens, quoted by Ford 134-35.

[25]Ford 129.

[26]Levy 7.

[27]Joseph Brogunier, "The Dreams of Montague Tigg and Jonas Chuzzlewit," The Dickensian Autumn 1962: 166.

[28]Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit 798.

[29]Dickens, David Copperfield (New York: Signet, 1962) 88-89.

[30]Kenneth Ireland, "Urban Perspectives: Fantasy and Reality in Hoffmann and Dickens," Comparative Literature 30 (1978): 146.

[31]Donald Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965) 87.

[32]Julian Symons, Charles Dickens (New York: Roy, 1951) 85-87.

[33]Juliet McMaster, Dickens the Designer (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1987) 200.

[34]U. C. Knoepflmacher, Laughter and Despair: Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971) 148-50.

[35]Michael Hollington, Dickens and the Grotesque (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm, 1984) 220.

[36]Taylor Stoehr, Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1965) 67.

[37]J. H. Matthews, Surrealism and the Novel (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1966) 6.

Chapter I: "Bleak House"

[1]Charles Dickens, Bleak House, ed. Norman Page (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 540-41. All subsequent references are also to this edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

[2]Priscilla Gibson, "Dickens's Uses of Animism," Nineteenth Century Fiction 7.4 (March, 1953): 285, 291.

[3]J. Hillis Miller, Introduction to Bleak House (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 11, 20.

[4]Juliet McMaster, Dickens the Designer (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1987) 173.

[5]Taylor Stoehr, Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1965) 167.

[6]Christopher Mulvey, "A Surreal Image in Bleak House: A Landlord and His Tenants," Dickens Studies Newsletter 8.3 (September, 1977): 69.

[7]Mulvey 72.

[8]Bert G. Hornback, Noah's Arkitecture: A Study of Dickens' Mythology (Athens: Ohio UP, 1972) 94-95.

[9]G. K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens (London: Methuen, 1906) 47-48.

[10]Julian Symons, Charles Dickens (New York: Roy, 1951) 90.

[11]Symons 85-86.

[12]J. McMaster 163-64.

[13]Symons 89.

[14]J. McMaster 164-65.

[15]J. McMaster 164-65.

[16]J. McMaster 165.

[17]Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," The Dickens Critics, eds. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961) 216.

[18]J. Hillis Miller and David Borowitz, Charles Dickens and George Cruikshank (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, U of California, 1971) 25.

[19]Stoehr 166.

[20]Stoehr 165.

[21]Christopher Herbert, "The Occult in Bleak House," Modern Critical Interpretations: Charles Dickens's Bleak House, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1987) 131.

[22]Elliot Gose, Imagination Indulged: The Irrational in the Nineteenth-Century Novel (Montreal: McGill UP, 1972) 92.

[23]J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958) 203.

[24]Miller 204.

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[1]Charles Dickens, Letters (Nonesuch), III, 186; quoted in Donald Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965) 97.

[2]Fanger 97.

[3]Fanger 97.

[4]Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, ed. R. D. McMaster (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965) 13. All subsequent references are also to this edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

[5]Priscilla Gibson, "Dickens's Uses of Animism," Nineteenth Century Fiction 7.4 (March, 1953): 287.

[6]Chesterton, Charles Dickens (London: Methuen, 1906) 168.

[7]Kenneth Ireland, "Urban Perspectives: Fantasy and Reality in Hoffmann and Dickens," Comparative Literature 30 (1978): 140.

[8]Michael Hollington, Dickens and the Grotesque (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm, 1984) 220.

[9]Julian Symons, Charles Dickens (New York: Roy, 1951) 87.

[10]Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," The Dickens Critics, eds. George Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961) 217.

[11]Taylor Stoehr, Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1965) 136.

[12]Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights, ed. David Daiches (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 321.

[13]Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Rinehart, 1953) 133.

[14]Chesterton 47-48.

[15]Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, ed. R. D. McMaster (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965) 332. See note 3.

[16]Julian Moynahan, "The Hero's Guilt: The Case of Great Expectations," Essays in Criticism 10.1 (January, 1960): 77.

[17]Moynahan 64.

[18]Moynahan 66-67.

[19]Moynahan 70.

[20]Moynahan 71-74.

[21]Carol Hanbery MacKay, "Surrealization and the Redoubled Self: Fantasy in David Copperfield and Pendennis," Dickens Studies Annual 14 (1989): 241, 245.

[22]Moynahan 67, 70.

[23]Moynahan 75-77.

[24]Stoehr 129.

[25]Moynahan 78.

[26]Moynahan 78.

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[2]U. C. Knoepflmacher, Laughter and Despair: Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971) 143.

[3]David Gascoyne, A Short Survey of Surrealism (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), x.

[4]Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, ed. Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 800. All subsequent references are also to this edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

[5]J. McMaster 199.

[6]J. H. Matthews, Surrealism and the Novel (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1966) 157.

[7]Knoepflmacher 148-49.

[8]J. McMaster 205.

[9]Knoepflmacher 148-50.

[10]R. D. McMaster, "Man into Beast in Dickensian Caricature," University of Toronto Quarterly 31.3 (April, 1962): 354.

[11]Knoepflmacher 150.

[12]Donald Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965), 86-87.

[13]Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," Eight Essays (New York: Doubleday, 1954) 74-75.

[14]Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Rinehart, 1953) 128.

[15]J. McMaster 198-200.

[16]Peter Lewis, "The Waste Land of Our Mutual Friend," Durham U Journal 70 (1977): 17.

[17]Dickens, Our Mutual Friend 907 n. 6.

[18]T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, ed. Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair (New York: Norton, 1973) 459.

[19]Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952) 1043.

[20]Johnson 1043.

[21]Andrew Sanders, Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist (London: Macmillan, 1982) 166.

[22]The Anglican Church, The Book of Common Prayer (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1962) 602.

[23]Johnson 1044.

[24]Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," The Dickens Critics, ed. George Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961) 215.

[25]Joseph Gold, Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist (U of Minnesota P, 1972) 257.

[26]Mary Ann Kelly, "From Nightmare to Reverie: Continuity in Our Mutual Friend," Durham University Journal 79 (December, 1986): 46-47.

[27]Kelly 49.

[28]George Levine, The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 209.

[29]Knoepflmacher 161.

[30]Knoepflmacher 161.

[31]Knoepflmacher 143.

Conclusion

[1]J. H. Matthews, Surrealism and the Novel (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1966) 15.

[2]George Ford, Dickens and His Readers (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1955) 259. Ford refers to Dickens's novels as "Gothic Masterpieces."

[3]Harry Stone, "What's in a Name: Fantasy and Calculation in Dickens," Dickens Studies Annual 14 (1985): 203.

[4]Chesterton, Charles Dickens (London: Methuen, 1906) 47.

[5]Mark Spilka, Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation (London: Dobson, 1963) 16.

[6]Robert Newsom, Dickens on the Romantic Side of Familiar Things: Bleak House and the Novel Tradition (New York: Columbia UP, 1977) 131.

[7]John Romano, Dickens and Reality (New York: Columbia UP, 1978) 2.

[8]F. M. Dostoevsky, quoted in Donald Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens and Gogol (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965) 215.

[9]See, for example, Loralee MacPike, Dostoevsky's Dickens: A Study of Literary Influence (London: George Prior, 1981); and Mark Spilka, Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation (London: Dobson, 1963)

[10]Julian Symons, Charles Dickens (New York: Roy, 1951) 90.

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